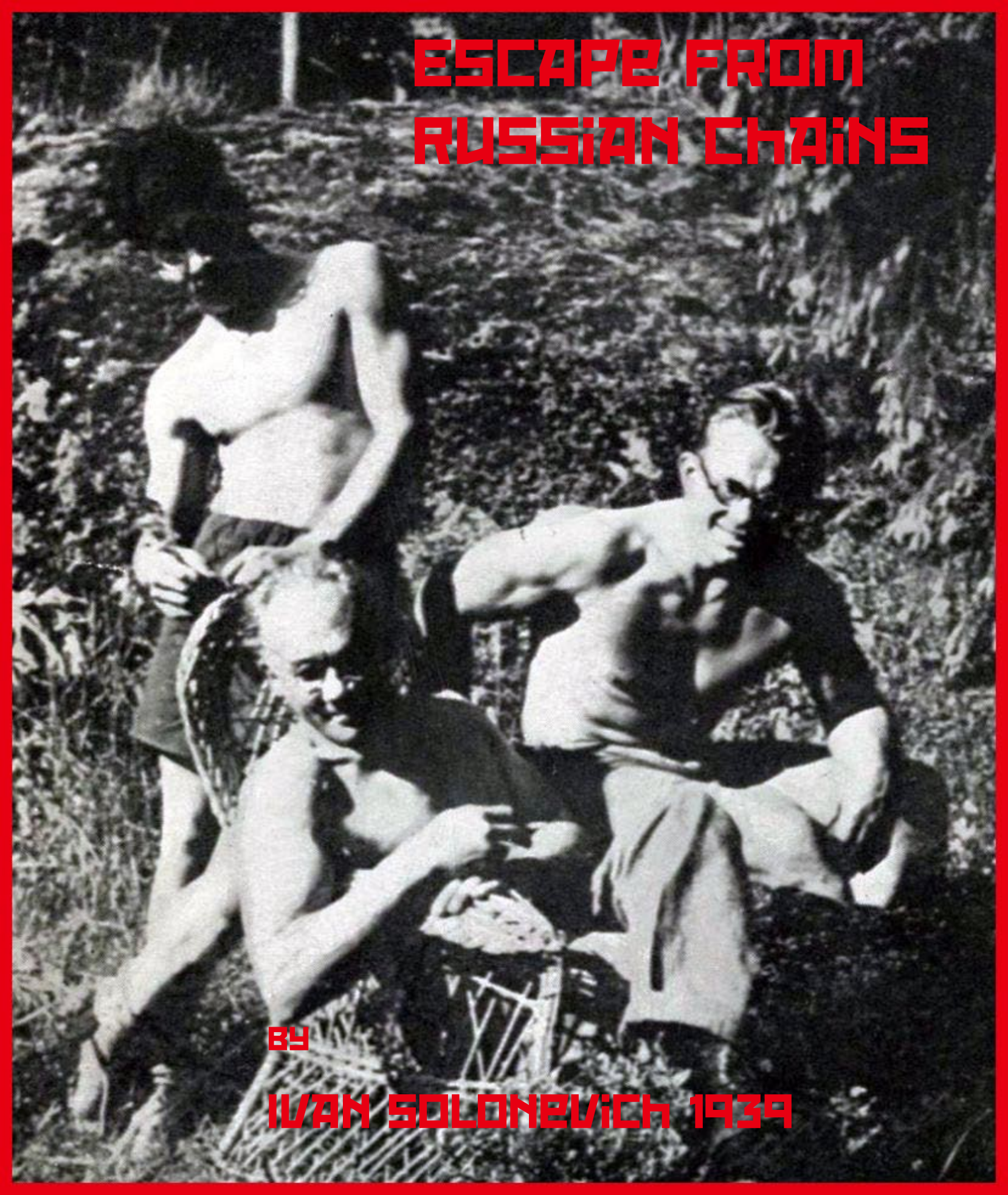


# ESCAPE FROM RUSSIAN CHAINS

BY

IVAN SOLONEVICH 1939







YURA, IVAN AND BORIS SOLONEVICH

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IVAN SOLONEVICH

*translated by*

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LONDON WILLIAMS AND NORGATE LTD  
GREAT RUSSELL STREET

T R A N S L A T O R ' S   N O T E

For valuable assistance in translating this book I am under obligations to my  
wife Lubov W. Harrow and my friend

Mr. Ivan Losseff.

W. H.

# PROLETARIAT

## Medgora

Medgora, the „Bear Mountain” now the capital of the White Sea-Baltic Camp and ‘Combine’, was, until recently, an insignificant junction on the Murmansk Railway, at the northern extremity of Lake Oniega. After the liquidation of Fodporozhie, it became the most southern camp of the W.B.C. system.

The W.B.C.<sup>1</sup> has virtually suppressed what was the Independent Karelian Republic, and Medgora is now its capital.

It is now a growing settlement near the railway. Its sturdy log buildings form the Headquarters of the W.B.C.; with its divisions, laboratories, and departments and dormitories of the Cheka (G.P.U.) separated from the proletarian section of the camp, and surrounded by a vast park, stands the residence of the higher administration.

To the east of the railway is situated the First Camp for the imprisoned engineers, planning-economists, technicians, bookkeepers, and other specialists.

On the lake, near the pier, the Second Camp accommodates the workers of the numerous enterprises of the W.B.C., its flour mills, docks, warehouses, garage; its telephone, and the radio stations, the printers; and the numerous carpenter brigades, the busiest workers of all—are continually erecting new barracks, storehouses, and prisons.

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<sup>1</sup> White Sea—Baltic Combine

Medgora is the show place of the entire W.B.C., and, if the consensus of prisoner opinion is reliable, of the entire vast concentration camp system of the Soviets.

At one dizzy moment of sheer creative satisfaction, the camp-administration was so enthused with its labour of love that it was anxious to throw the camp open for foreign tourist inspection.

A few miles further north, the Third Camp, in every way unsuitable for tourist inspection, serves as a clearing house for the prisoners who are transferred singly to the camp or from one section to another.

There a prisoner is detained for two or three days before proceeding North.

Within the radius of 18-20 miles are scattered several other camps in which the textile and the sewing shops, the lumber camps and a large sovkhos, 'Vichka', with its two hectares of hot-houses, are situated, where some fifteen thousand prisoners were labouring.

In the southern part of the town there is a 'Tree' nonprisoner settlement for the railwaymen, a club, and a market. There are shops, a 'Gossiprt' or the Soviet Government Vodka Monopoly, and a 'Torgsin' (an establishment where goods and foods, otherwise unprocurable, are exchanged for foreign currency, gold, silver, or precious stones). In short, it contains everything to furnish a major base for 'economic' operations. The prisoners are forbidden, at least officially, to enter the 'free town' just as the 'free' population is forbidden the camp. Unofficially, the restrictions are not enforced, and this allows the authorities, as occasion requires, to remove the prisoners into the penal isolators and the 'free' citizens into the camp.

The cordon embracing the camp is largely psychological, based upon a theory, from time to time confirmed, that the long arm of the G.P.U. will always operate, if, and when necessary. This is deemed a practical way of teaching the lesson: Don't be too clever!

From a casual remark here and there, we have gathered that we shall arrive at Medgora at an unpropitious time. Purging was in operation. In the land of

Soviets, the 'purging' (like the W.P.A. pink slips) usually takes place once in six months. The philosophy of purging rests on the ridiculous assumption that a bureaucratic system can function without bureaucratic machinery. The government which plans and controls the policies, the economy, the ideology, and the geographical distribution of industry, the peasants' cattle, the herring rations, the cut of your coat and marital relations.

The government, in short, which squeezes everything out and tracks everything down, can operate successfully without any planning, projecting, or sleuthing. This supposition exists, however, and for some time it appeared preposterous to my naive mind.

Later, as I observed and formed my own conclusions, it dawned upon me that this was intended to impress the people with the idea that the government is the embodiment of all human achievement and efficiency, but that the 'machine', the local administration, the men down the line, are utterly useless, and that the government alone conducts the affairs of the community as they should be.

Is it the government's fault, for instance, if the local authorities directing the hog-raising campaign, compel a young kolkhoz woman to wet-nurse a suckling pig? The government is obviously blameless in that. Is it the 'machine' again? Or the 'legacy of the accursed old regime', or a bureaucratic approach, 'the drifting away from the masses', the 'loss of class consciousness', and so forth? But the system itself is Simon pure and blameless; it is so impeccable that it can be successfully operated anywhere in the whole wide world.

In finding victims to serve as scapegoats for its blunders, the Soviets have eclipsed the closest adherents of Machiavelli, in the realm of practical politics. With each succeeding year this subterfuge becomes less and less convincing. A doubt assails the most sanguine: the most obtuse remark: „Say what you will, cut down the 'machine' and approach the masses as you will, the muddle remains as hopeless as when you first gave us your assurances of a speedy millennium.”

Eighteen years of revolutionary water has flown under the party bridge, but the comrade-administrators still compel a woman to wet-nurse a suckling pig; still insist on a medical examination of school-girls 'for the purpose of establishing the fact of virginity'.

These revolutionary fruits ripen in a country that officially styles itself the 'Freest in the world'.

Such sacramental and occult utterances as the 'accursed old regime', The 'legacy of serfdom', The 'age-long backwardness of Russia' become increasingly incredible.

Under the pre-revolutionary government, although chronologically nearer serfdom than the Soviets, such manifestations of Socialistic progress were simply inconceivable, an impossibility. Not because they were repressed by authority, but because there was no crank to proclaim them, no doctor to inspect, no schoolgirl who would submit to inspection.

To dispel scepticism new slogans are inscribed on the banners, new dangers from outside are urged, and unity under a restored patriotism is imposed upon the potential critic.

One of these devices is the 'life beautiful' movement. This looks well in the columns of the government-owned and controlled Press, and bemuses both the vacillating emigre Intelligentsia, who for the want of a virile political programme, begin to Tive (?) down their misgivings at a safe distance, as well as the depressed middle and working classes of other countries, who implore their governments to turn to Russia for a panacea for their economic troubles. Quite an up-to-date proceeding!

In the merry-go-round of government measures, each Soviet institution travels through the same cycle; the contraction, the consolidation, the breaking-up and the expansion, and back to contraction, world without end.

When, as a result of previous measures, a department becomes swollen beyond its housing capacity, it is reduced inexorably, ruthlessly, speedily, and also inefficiently. After its reduction, it emerges in so crippled a state



that it fails to function. The personnel loses everyone who has no influence, no party-card, and no ability to blind the eyes of the mighty. The department is then left temporarily in peace, with strict instructions to swell no more.

But the pressure of work produces another phase. Several reduced departments combine, the blind unite with the lame, and the deaf join the dumb. When the merger is completed, they paint a new sign on the door and project a new plan-problem under which the re-born begin to develop, slowly at first but with steady persistence.

This period of consolidation corresponds in the slogan department to centralisation, specialisation, industrialisation, and generally to the greater undertakings.

When the consolidated department has prepared, around its castle in Spain, sufficient broad acres to branch out, it is time for the slogans to appear. There is an approach to the masses, an approach to the factory, to the women, the modus vivendi, the cows, and the village. During the notorious rabbit-raising campaign, we had a slogan, 'approach to the social peculiarities of a rabbit'. We approached. The rabbits perished.

One All-Union, all-embracing, all-something institution begins branching out into separate 'Strois' (constructions), trusts, and boards. They are all approaching something, a term for a new phase of deception. They discover new methods and discern new vistas, which obviously need new men. They get them, and shamelessly expand, without as much as by your leave, until they have no more space to spin in, and the new spell of restriction overwhelms them.

This farce has been proceeding for eighteen years, and will continue as long as the Soviet system imposes tasks upon its workers, beyond the power of any one department to perform. No department can plan the 'life beautiful', and say how many kisses are permissible according to the theories of Marx-Lenin-Stalin. No control can keep account of every herring in every co-operative store.

They have to pile planner upon planner, inspector on inspector, spy upon spy. Then they must plan the controlling and the spying. When all these undertakings are complete, it becomes evident—to rulers so mentally conditioned—that it is necessary to watch the spies and to spy upon the planners. Hence, the planning section is organised at the G.P.U. and a G.P.U. section is organised at the Gosplan. In the planning section of the G.P.U. a spying cell is formed, and in the G.P.U. section of the Gosplan a planning control group is organised.

Each rusty herring in the co-operative store spawns planners, controllers, and spies. Such a burden even the putrid co-operative herring cannot sustain.

Outside the concentration camps, the loss of employment through cutting down one department is compensated by a growth of the personnel in another. All the boys and girls assist in helping a fellow to find a new berth, since everyone is aware that his turn may be next.

The disorganisation of labour has reached saturation point, and usage has sanctioned most outrageous official malfeasance. The man who is discharged simply empties his brief case of papers and walks out. If and when these papers fall to the lot of another office refugee, the latter will take his time in sorting them.

There is no hurry and, besides, one may be back in the 'home' department at any moment.

No one becomes firmly attached owing to the risk. What precisely is the sociological reason for preserving the employment of the specialists and skilled workers in a state of fluctuation, I do not know.

But it is a fact that if, in consequence of foresight, pull, or graft, somebody succeeds in remaining in one occupation long enough to know it, that very fact is usually cited against him at the next purging. His dismissal is self-explanatory: 'he has taken root'.

I have, I believe, established an All-Union record of being 'rooted' to my task for six years. True, the office was hors concours—physical culture. Everyone welcomed it, but no one knew anything about it.

When my sins ultimately overwhelmed me, the commission ordered that I be discharged 'as having taken root; as inexperienced; as having nothing in common with physical culture, and as having shown no results'. Meanwhile, the Gosizdat—the Government Publishing Trust—had published during that period six of my textbooks on physical culture. However, let that rest.

You will see that, outside the camp, the inconvenience of a transfer brought no real hardship in its train. But within its confines it became a threat to our plans.

We had intrigued for a transfer to Medgora before we knew of the impending purging there. And there was no expanding department to absorb us. Engineers, planners, bookkeepers, and typists were dismissed and dispatched to the Third Camp the same day. They chopped wood and cleaned the w.c.s for a couple of days, and then moved North.

They may return during another period of expansion, but Yura and I might miss the day planned for escape if we were transferred away from the frontier, and so jeopardise Boris's chances as well as our own.

I felt depressed when we set out under guard to the U.R.CH., but Yura tramped merrily on in the soggy snow, and whistled.

## The Third Camp

The Medgora U.R.CH. is just as bedraggled and repulsive an institution as the Podporozhie U.R.CH. The local timekeeper and our guard started an argument. The guard had handed us over and obtained a receipt, but the

time-keeper had no guard to accompany us to the Third Camp, and demanded that the Podporozhie guard should deliver us to our final destination. Our guard refuses, and disappears behind a volley of invective. The time-keeper wishes to avoid responsibility, and yet cannot make up his mind to allow us to travel alone. At the end of another altercation, heated enough to save his face, he permits us to persuade him to procure us a pass and even a sleigh for our belongings, and we set out unguarded.

At the Third Camp we make the rounds of the local officials and finally settle in Barrack 19.

It is a roomy, well-lighted barrack with a high ceiling and three times as many windows as in our barrack at Pogra, but since there are only two stoves, the cold is terrible. In the middle of the long wall is the 'Red Corner' (a modern equivalent for the old Orthodox shrine). It is a niche with a window, boasting a table covered with red fustian and littered with a few propagandist brochures. The walls are decorated with portraits of the 'leaders' and the mottoes of the day.

There are many empty bunks after the departure northward of a party of newly-reduced prisoners. Another party is expected to leave in two or three days, and we incur the risk of being included. But sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof: we must have some sleep.

Everyone had to get up at five-thirty to go to Medgora to work, but we knew that we were not yet listed in any work-brigade, and repeated the trick we played at Pogra. We went out with the rest, hung round the w.c.s until the work columns disappeared, and then went back to sleep.

Later in the morning we inspected the Camp, and found it somewhat better than at Pogra. But we could not have walked through from the Third Camp to Medgora, although there was no barbed-wire fence between them. Instead there was the swift River Vichka, whose steep banks were so covered with frozen spume that it was almost impossible to ford or cross the stream in winter. There are scores of rivers such as this on our way to the frontier, and this one showed that we could not possibly cross them.

There is a bridge across the river but it is guarded by a „Popka”—the armed guard. He would not let us through without a pass from the Chief of the Camp. The latter looked us over very suspiciously and flatly refused to issue one.

„No passes for you, but tell me why are you not at work?”

I explained that we had only arrived at five o'clock, but I felt that my 'specialist's' airs and graces did not impress anybody there. There are too many of us passing through the Third Camp daily, cleaning the toilets and doing other onerous work, to impress the Camp Commandant. It is obvious that I must devise other means of influencing people and winning friends, but what these means are, I am still at a loss to tell. We went back to the 'Red Corner' and set out the chessmen.

During the day we were assigned to the work brigade of a certain Mukharenkov. Toward nightfall the work brigades returned and we scrutinised them. They were a motley crowd. A few teachers and engineers, a chemist, many workers, and even more 'Urks' (professional criminals).

An Urk came up to me and with the friendliest air lingered my leather windbreaker for its quality.

„A fine windbreaker! Where did you get it?”

Behind this light social banter I could see his business brain trying to express value in terms of litres of alcohol. The result must have been satisfactory, judging by his friendliness. Now, it is only time and opportunity that will relieve me of it.

An Urk in a barrack is worse than cold, congestion, lice, or bed-bugs. His presence destroys even an illusion of comparative comfort and security. Going to work, one leaves one's food and possessions behind. If an Urk manages to be put in charge of the barrack for the day, one will come back to find no food, no clothing, and no Urk. He will reappear in two or three days, by which time your food is eaten, your things are sold or bartered for drink, and in that liquid state shared among the Urks and the local activists,



the chief of the column, the statistician, someone from the U.R.Ch., and the rest of the gang, which means that there is nobody to appeal to, no one to investigate. Experienced prisoners said that the simplest thing in the long run was to lose one's all at the very beginning and then to become resigned to that classical form of existence: *Omnia mea mecum porto*<sup>2</sup>.

At Pogra certain circumstances, which the reader of *Russia in Chains*<sup>3</sup> may recall, prevented the Urks from robbing us, and we were extremely loath to lose what we had, not only in consequence of natural human egoism, but because several of our possessions were essential for our escape.

Yet the Urks, with all their faults, were not as bad as the activists. For two or three days we had protected ourselves by wearing as much clothing as we could and going to work dressed in that fashion, when something happened to reassure us.

In the middle of the night, I was awakened by moans and groans that came from the bunk above ours, occupied by a young lad. I asked him what was the matter.

„I have pains in the stomach, and I can't bear it. I am all on fire,” he said hoarsely.

In the morning, when he had to turn out for work, he managed to climb down, but collapsed on the floor. He was lifted back to his upper bunk and left alone, with a few choice remarks from the statistician, and a promise not to requisition any food for him. „Those who do not work—do not eat.”

We came back late that night and found the lad still moaning in his bunk. I examined him and, even with my limited medical knowledge, could see that he was suffering from ulcers in the stomach, the result, no doubt, of too much rotten cabbage, under-done bread, and other delicacies provided by our camp cuisine.

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<sup>2</sup> "All that is mine I carry with me"

<sup>3</sup> Solonevich - *Russia In Chains* (1938)

After so much physical labour in the open, Yura and I went to sleep immediately. After a time, I woke up feeling cold. Yura was gone. We were accustomed to sleep back to back, so that the available bedding could keep both of us reasonably warm. His departure was thus made immediately noticeable from the fall in temperature.

In about half an hour Yura came back with an old man, a doctor, who was trying to explain to Yura that he could not absent himself, that he had no medicine and no accommodation at the infirmary, but his objections were of no avail. Yura towered over him with the air of a professional gangster and refused to take 'No' for an answer. „Examine him first, and we shall see what remains to do. We will find room. If not, I shall go to Uspensky himself,” he said.

Uspensky was the commandant of the Camp, but the doctor had no way of knowing how Yura came to the Third Camp and what sort of relationship he might have with Uspensky. The doctor sighed, listened with suspicion to my tentative diagnosis, and promised to send the stretcher to-morrow.

„That is to-morrow, but we have to take care of him tonight, from this moment,” Yura assured him.

A few Urks were pressing round, and at the mention of a stretcher, they instantly produced a blood-stained, torn, but still serviceable one, which left the doctor no further room for argument. The lad was placed none too gently on the stretcher and the volunteers, followed by the doctor and Yura, carried him away.

The following morning, while we were putting on our entire wardrobe before going to work, a typical Urk, puffing on a makhorka 'coffin nail' and spitting daintily around him, came over and silently contemplated Yura for a while.

„Your 'pakhan'?” he asked.

„What 'pakhan'?” countered Yura, bewildered.

„Well, your old man, your father. Don't you understand the human language?“ „Yes, he is my father.“

„All right. Now, about your things. Don't worry, nobody will touch them. Rest assured. The lad they took away is one of us. So, you know what I mean, you—for us, and we—for you.“

I had heard before of honour among thieves, but did not quite believe it. Yura, however, responded immediately by taking off his things, and I had to follow suit so as not to spoil by hesitation the effect of his spontaneity, as a sign of confidence and cordiality. The Urk looked at us with approval, and spat to seal the pact of non-aggression.

„If they touch anything, just let me know. We are not the G.P.U., but we shall soon find out who it was. And then . . .“

The Urks acquitted themselves nobly. We did not miss a single article, even after we left Medgora. This mysterious organisation of Urks proved to be ubiquitous, and was somewhat like a Chinese tong' of beggars and mendicants.

A little later Yura had an opportunity of getting a glimpse of their strange world, which, like the fourth dimension, was coexistent and yet quite apart from ours. It lived according to its own law, alien, inscrutable, and implacable. But whatever it was, we were given the freedom of it.

## In a Day-Labourer's Shoes

At half-past five, while it is still dark, we get up. A breakfast line forms and waits patiently for the morning porridge. The portions are twice as large as at Podporozhie, which is in keeping with the Soviet order of things, where

life is more abundant around the administrative centres, and grows leaner away from them.

We fall in by brigades, get our labour assignment, and disperse in all directions. Our brigade is dispatched to the commandant of Medgora. We arrive, in the administrative town, at a large parade ground surrounded by buildings, offices, and warehouses. In the middle of it, perched upon an ornate pillar, is the bust of Dzerzhinski (Chief of the G.P.U.), the founder of the Camp and the ex-officio benefactor of its population.

Our brigadier disappeared and returned with a gloomy-looking man, clad in a prisoner's 'bushlat', a walrus moustache adorning his pock-marked face. The man looks with contempt over our heterogeneous but ragged and bedraggled crew and appoints our daily quota of work. Some are to remove snow, others will excavate an ice-house for the Cheka dining-room. When everybody was gone, the gloomy man said to us:

„You two, with your spectacles, take shovels and follow me.”

He set the pace over the piles of snow, refuse, sawdust, and boards. We followed as best we could, but our minds were working on the important problem of placing our guide. His present official position did not interest us so much as his past, his personal past. He looked like a dyed-in-the-wool worker, but we must be certain.

He brought us to a yard where boards, beams, sheathing, and ends were piled up in confusion, gave it an all-embracing glance, and said:

„This will do. This mess must be cleaned up. You sort this out, so that the boards are with the boards, the beams with the beams, and so on. Stack it up in good order.”

I looked it over with a glance no less embracing, and said that ten men could work here for a month.

„What's your hurry?” the man shrugged. „Isn't your term long enough? Ten years is what you have, I dare say.” „Well, not quite ten, but eight—yes.”

„Time enough, you see. Well, go ahead, pile them up. Knock off at four and come over, I'll give you your time. Are you new arrivals ?”

„Yes.”

„Pile them up, but don't strain yourself. There's no sense in that. Cannot do everything at once, so don't rush yourselves.” He turned and went his way. Yura and I looked things over, planned our work and started to shift gradually the boards and beams. After about an hour's work I could plainly feel how weak I was and how unfit for any physical exertion. I could barely lift my feet.

The sky cleared. We sat on the boards in the sun, our new work quickening the blood in our veins, the sight of new faces setting new problems calling for new attitudes and adaptations. We lunched on bread as one does lunch and dine in the camps, and outside all over Russia for that matter, carefully chewing every mouthful and picking up crumbs no matter where they fall. And we talked of many things before we resumed work.

Time slid by quickly, and it was four o'clock before we knew it. We left the work and went to get our time from the „commandant”. The work certificate is a sort of voucher, issued by the 'Svork-giver', a *de jure* impersonal employer, but *de facto* an absolute master. It shows the number of work hours and the work done, in percentages of the quota, or the daily assignment.

We waited for the gloomy man at the desk to finish his telephone conversation and to ask for our names. I told him mine. He put it down and added something else and looked up at Yura, who, taking our relationship for granted, was silent. The fact of a father and a son sharing the same fate, so simple outside, assumed a different aspect here and gave rise to implications that had to be probed into.

„Relations?” asked the gloomy one.

I explained.



„A clean sweep. What? Not a bad arrangement at all, not even a spawn left at large. A clean sweep indeed.”

He handed us the work certificates, redeemable in bread, and we went out. Outside Yura looked them over idly, and suddenly executed an Indian dance, which took me back many years—to his nursery and recollections of the infant joy that used to call it forth.

„Look, Dad!” cried he. I did.

Solonevich Ivan—8 hours—quota—135 per cent. Solonevich Yura—8 hours—quota—135 per cent.

We were speechless. Think what it meant! We had exceeded the quota 35 per cent and thereby earned the right to a ‘super-shock’ ration of two and a half pounds of bread. Two and a half pounds was so much capital. But the sudden revelation that even a camp world is not without kind people was more than anything else.

## The Mystery of the 135 per cent

The broken ranks of our brigades were marching wearily home. Yura and I were very tired although we had accomplished little. The work certificate still puzzled me. What was the reason for granting us such bounty?

Here, at Medgora, we were at the bottom of the local social ladder. We were surrounded and oppressed by countless chiefs and foremen, whose first duty was to wring out of us that communistic ‘surplus-value’, which is vastly more avaricious than the capitalistic surplus value, so naively unmasked by Marx in his Capital.

Here they worked one down to the bone. The ultimate responsibility for sweating rested upon the labour director who signed the work certificate. And having experienced the toil, we felt that if we persevere in this we would not merely fail to maintain whatever is an equivalent of the 135 per cent of the norm, but slip down to something like 35 per cent.

It is all very well to have a kind soul to sign for a 135 per cent to-day, but what about to-morrow? The kind soul may not be there. The future may prove gloomy.

I overtook the brigadier and offered a cigarette to open a reconnoitring conversation about the work we were going to do and the chiefs who were over us. The term drew a sceptical rejoinder:

„Eh, there are no chiefs. They are all our kind.”

That did not help me because I could not place the brigadier or estimate his standing. I pressed for further information.

„Our own chaps, artisans, workmen,” he said.

That was better but not explicit enough. First because there is no stratum of society more heterogeneous than the much discussed workman, and secondly because behind that name skulks a motley crowd of Urks, kulaks, Activists pursuing a career, the young of the Intelligentsia acquiring a proletarian veneer and touchiness, and many nameless others. „There are workmen and workmen, you know,” I answered.

„There may be, but not here. The garages, the power houses, workshops, and mills would take only the ‘genuine article’. It is so in their own interest, and they keep only the qualified, Tsar’s workmen.”

A qualified workman of the old regime sounded reassuring and quite distinctive. The 135 per cent on my work certificate lose their aura of mystery and assume the air of a certain legitimacy, because the workman, and especially one of the old school, would be certain to render assistance to us of the Intelligentsia to the utmost of his power.

True, under the circumstances, the gloomy commandant ran a certain risk, if someone discovered how much we had really done, but in Soviet Russia people are already accustomed to run risks, not only for themselves but for others as well.

I should like to digress and to generalise a little.

I cannot point to any definite group for the support of my opinion, but I have always considered the accepted theory of a rift between the Intelligentsia and the workman, no more than an academic abstraction, an outgrowth of a swivel-chair conception of life, so dear to the heart of the Russian literary fraternity.

How many idealistic philosophies, 'Weltanschauung', mystical and transcendental fables, are launched upon that uncharted sea; the untutored, uncritical Russian brain! And what confusion of terms and concepts it has occasioned! It seems to me that the oil of new reason must be poured upon these incoherent brain waves. It is a matter of mental health, a question of intellectual life or death for the Russians to rid themselves of the nonsense that darkens their vision. Much of it has been exposed and dispersed under Soviet pressure, but it is still enshrined in the ranks of the Russian emigres.

To illustrate the relationship between the workman and the Intelligentsia, I will recall a typical incident.

In 1921-22, Odessa, a former thriving grain-port on the Black Sea, was passing through its so-called 'peaceful insurrection'. Alleged workmen went from house to house of the alleged bourgeois and took everything which, they thought, *de jure*, was reserved for the bourgeois—surplus property—which *de facto* was deemed desirable by the insurgents.

It was tempting and very simple to say: „Look at your Russian class-conscious working man!" But in reality the plunderers were not workmen, nor did they represent a class. They were beachcombers, the rag-tag and bobtail, or what the Germans term „Lumpenproletariat", from the outskirts of a busy sea-port, the very root of the Activist's family tree.

They were no more workmen than an old regime precinct police sergeant, who used to beat drunken 'dvorniks',<sup>4</sup> or a landowner, who squandered his last mortgage money, was a member of the Intelligentsia.

These academic, visionary and mystical theories and prognostications played a very sinister part.

They segregated an essentially homogeneous people into antagonistic groups. The worst sections of each social group were mistakenly represented as normal, although the characteristic traits of the defectives were glaringly evident.

Bolshevism manifested a touch of genius and was unscrupulous in making real use of the visionary world. It derived very solid advantages from the vagaries of the Intelligentsia. The Russian Revolution, which hurled me from comparative comfort into the depths where I was reduced to cleaning garbage pits in a Concentration Camp, now afforded me a rare opportunity for checking the current theories and points of view, my own as well as others.

Frankly, one year in a Concentration Camp is not too high a price to pay for clarification of thought, and I am inclined to think that for a certain group of the Russian emigres a year's incarceration in a Concentration Camp would prove an excellent eye-opener, a safe parachute for their descent to earth.

It is quite probable that certain new groups of returning expatriates will have to endure the decompression chamber of the camp.

Another personal experience in the turbulent days of the 'peaceful insurrection' in Odessa may further illustrate my contention.

Working as a longshoreman at that time, I was sent for a load of beans. The driver had other calls to make, and left me to fill the bags alone and without

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<sup>4</sup> Porter, concierge, or yardman

any loading equipment. I was trying to make the best of it, when the whistle of a factory nearby released groups of workmen for their homeward walk.

A few glanced at me in passing, conversed in nods and monosyllables, stumped about indecisively, when the sense of doing the right thing triumphed over any dislike of interference, and they entered the warehouse.

„Why did they, the sons of bitches, put only one man to do the work of many?” a man inquired, by way of displaying his true colours.

„Probably there was nobody else to do it,” I temporised.

„Don’t they have longshoremen enough? Why, the commissariats are full of them! Come on, boys, let’s help.”

And they did. There were about ten of them and the beans were ‘liquidated’ in an hour’s time. Slapping approvingly the bulging side of the last bag, one of them said:

„That’s how it is, brother, when we do things, so to say, collectively. One, two, and all’s finished!” A pause to let the alternative sink into me. „Let’s light up and get going, fellows, or we’ll hear about it at home. Are you an old hand at loading?”

I mumbled something indistinctly, but another workman understood my disconcerted manner.

„Listen, comrade, don’t be a fool. You can see for yourself that he is an educated man, and it is plain that loading is not his business.”

„That’s why everything is going on the way it is,” summed up another workman, „A man fit to load the bags legislates, and the one who was brought up and educated out of the people’s pocket and is fit to legislate, loads the bags alone. Small wonder that we are not getting anywhere.”

The first workman pulled up his rope-belted trousers, and fervently prophesied: „Never mind, we’ll cut their guts out. Some day.”



The conventional guts of the officers, landowners, and kulaks having been cut out for some time. I gave vent to my surprise.

„Whose guts are you going to cut out?” They were silent while their emotions ebbed.

„You know as well as we do, so don't let us mention names,” said he walking away. But suddenly he stopped and bent over.

„Have you seen a seat like that?”

The question was obviously rhetorical, since my own trousers, like the trousers of countless thousands of others, were in the same state of patchwork repair.

He resumed.

„In 1917 the comrades were talking big, and I thought that with the workman in power and government by the proletariat, I should soon have a new suit, and the rest to match. Since then, as you see, I am still wearing the same breeches, but with more holes in them. And still working my fool head off. The trousers are no better than the government. One patch overlaps another, and they call it administration. No, we shall have their guts!”

Of course, this was somewhat exaggerated, but in other respects the workman was right. The revolution went far, indeed, much farther than anyone intended in 1917.

Who, then, was typical of the workman as a class? Those, who plundered the bourgeois apartments, or those who helped me load the beans? The workers in the Donbas (the coal-mining district in the basin of the Don River), who fought against the Whites with the Lettish-Chinese-Hungarian machine guns prodding them in the back, or the workmen from the Izhevsk and Votkin works and plants, who formed their own battalions and joined Admiral Kolchak to become the best shock-troops he ever had?

Time marched on, signalised only by the changes in the party line: ‘the consolidation of the revolution’, ‘the liquidation of the kulak as a class on

the basis of a complete collectivisation of the village', the famine in the factories and in the villages, five million people in Concentration Camps. And all that time, the work of extermination of potential opponents proceeding in the basements of the Cheka, the G.P.U., or the present well-sounding Commissariat for Internal Affairs.

During those confused and tragic years I did my share on the labour front as a longshoreman, fisherman, co-operative store clerk, day labourer, Social Security worker, Professional Union worker, and finally as journalist. Thus I am conveying to the reader first-hand information concerning the working people of Russia and of their means of finding a livelihood.

A short excursion into what used to be purely sport but which became a life-sustaining necessity, may not be untimely.

I am speaking about fishing with rod and line. It furnishes one of the several possible answers to a question: how does the proletarian or the non-proletarian Russian manage to survive under economic conditions as they are?

Such survival is made possible by the vast open spaces. In countries where none exist, a revolution will extort a much higher price in human lives.

I know engineers who were driven to leave their profession and to resort to fishing and gathering mushrooms and berries. With fishing, despite my unskilfulness, I have saved myself and mine from starvation. This is how it operates.

Countless gangs of workmen, at liberty on their regular rest day or when sacrificing their pay, and risking re-classification as 'gadabouts', are foraging along the banks of the abundant Russian rivers, lakes, ponds, and streams for food. Near the populated centres, like Moscow, the banks are dotted with dug-outs and huts, covered with pine boughs and moss, where the proletarian fishermen spend their night hoping that the fish will bite or seek shelter from rain.

Here is a typical scene. The bank of the Ucha River in Moscow. The last bright red strip, of sunset has died down, the last rod is wound and put away. Around the dug-out gather the neighbour fishermen and soon a bonfire is blazing up, followed by the odour of „ookha’ (a sort of Russian fish-soup). One bag yields one half-litre of vodka, another bag—another ‘half-litre’. Soon, it is not worth anyone’s while to go to sleep before dawn. The twigs crackle in the fire, the bubbles ascend to the upturned bottoms of the bottles, our stomachs are replenished and making up for a week of emptiness, our bodies are warm.

If that is not an ideal prelude for a heart to heart talk with the proletariat, what is?

A priceless talk. There is no mysticism, no „Weltschmerz’, no transcendental theme. Just simple, honest, straightforward common sense. The kind that was woven in England by centuries of Parliamentary and local-government, a known in Russia as ‘healthy sense’.

The revolution, the Intelligentsia, the ‘Promfinplan”, the Party, the shops, the engineers, the ‘breakdowns’ of the Plan, morality, the war, and the rest, all that which makes the world go round, come up for discussion. Much of it the Soviet Press would not even dare to mention, while the phraseology would probably not be pleasing to anyone in the world.

The Cultural Section of the Professional Unions strove to organise them. ‘Red Huts’ were built and stocked with the requisite reading matter, and adorned with portraits of the leaders, Marx, Lenin, and Stalin.

The standing joke with the fishermen was, that not only they, but the perch have deserted the waters around the ‘Red Huts’.

Their silent but sturdy feeling was that politics here were decidedly off their reservation. The ‘Red Huts’ were gradually forgotten and sank to the ground. But the open forums around the camp fire went on, free from supervision and the paternal care of the Professional Unions.

If Russia possessed another Turgenev, he might write 'The Memoirs of a Fisherman' from Nature herself. Such memoirs would undoubtedly serve as much as a harbinger of a new day as the Memoirs of a Hunter, and help to accomplish another emancipation.

Out of the wealth of topics discussed during those heartfelt talks, I shall touch upon one, and that but lightly, without bringing too much evidence to bear upon it, pertinent as it is to the relations between the workman and the Intelligentsia.

If, on the one hand, there was no rift between them before the revolution, there was, on the other, no complete, clear-cut understanding, no interdependence which might heal the wounds of each. Now, after the dreadful years of the Socialist offensive, one section of the toiling masses began to feel and another part to understand clearly that somewhere, somehow, they have parted company with the Intelligentsia, in whose ranks they might find the practical idealists, but preferred to see the rascals instead. The former, then all is said and done, had in their time guided the country much better, more honestly and humanely than the Party and the Activists are governing it to-day.

Both the proletariat and the peasantry, and I am speaking of the average workman and the average peasant, feel somehow their guilt, their trespasses against us, especially against the old Intelligentsia, whom they consider better educated and more capable of guiding them than the new one.

This is the reason why I became conscious, whenever I came into contact with the workmen and peasants either as an equal or a subordinate, and with each passing year of the Revolution felt more strongly a certain unwritten motto:

„Preserve the Intelligentsia.”

This is not the famous Russian compassionateness; what compassion could one encounter in a camp built and sustained on corpses? This is not the soft-hearted pity of a God-seeker to a broken master.

Neither Yura nor I belong to the kind who, especially in a camp, would invite a feeling of pity or sorrow.

We were stronger and better nourished than the average. Their solicitude was as instinctive as the protection which the workman affords a fine tool. We are their most valuable tool, the heirs to the past, and the builders of the future Russian State and its culture.

And I, of the Intelligentsia, feel most earnestly, and with all my being, that I should do whatever is essential to the well-being of the Russian workman and the Russian peasant. I must do nothing else. The rest should not concern me; the rest concerns the Devil.

## The Days of Toil

The foregoing shows the reason why we have found ourselves accepted as if among our own people, when we descended to the camp's lower depths'.

With the others we sorted lumber, moved snow, and cleansed the garbage pits in the yards of the administrative buildings, loaded bags at the mill, cut ice on the lake, sawed and cut wood for the Chekists' apartments, cleared the approaches to the pier and the railway station. And not a single commandant or overseer out of the ten, or so, that we worked for, ever failed to vouch for 135 per cent of our working norm, i.e. for the maximum permitted by the camp regulations.

Once a foreman of a mill marked down 125 per cent. Yura looked dejected.

„Why did you mark down so little, comrade? Everybody marked us for 135 per cent; why should we appear like slackers, now?”

The foreman, with a bewildered expression on his tired face, said that they probably would not believe him, the sons of bitches, if he marked 135 per cent.

„Of course they will believe you,” I declared with conviction, „Once a time-keeper said that he never had a case like that. . . .”

„And what happened?” the foreman was interested. „I let him feel my muscles,” I explained.

„And he did?”

„Of course he did; and admitted that we are worth it.” The foreman looked us over appraisingly.

„Come to think of it, you look worth it. Let me alter it. You know, sometimes I would like to mark, let us say, a hundred per cent, but the man looks as if he has no strength to keep body and soul together.

Who would believe me? He might need it more than you do, but if I do that and the figures are checked, I shall be in the wrong, and . . . goodbye, my job.”

Our daily routine began at 5.30 a.m. After a breakfast of porridge, we set out on foot to Medgora where we worked for ten hours. Since the official working day in Soviet Russia is eight hours, all our labour certificates were marked—eight.

We came back dog-tired and began the round of the paper routine. We stood in line for an exchange of the work certificates for bread and dinner cards, and at a different station in another line for bread, and in a third line for dinner. . . . The meal over, we went to sleep back to back, covered with everything we possessed. Soon we were lost in dreamless sleep.

Speaking of dreams, Mr. and Mrs. Tchernavin (who succeeded in crossing the Soviet border a couple of years before we did, and published two books in English: (*I Speak for the Silent* and *Escape from the Soviets*) told me of the nightmares of flight and pursuit from which they suffered after their escape.

The three of us still have our dreadful dreams, but for some reason they all possess a common feature. We imagine that we are still in Moscow and that we must escape. Escape is imperative, that is self-evident, but how did I return there? I was abroad, the incredible life of freedom was a reality, and, as often occurs in dreams, I seem conscious that it is merely a dream and that it is not the first time that the nightmare of the return to Soviet life has oppressed me. I awaken and find Boris and Yura standing near, trying to shake me into sensibility.

But at Medgora we had no dreams. No matter how intense the cold, no matter what the roar of storm outside the flimsy walls, the hours of sleep fled like one moment. . . .

For 135 per cent of our norm we worked for all we were worth. There were many reasons for this, but we toiled primarily to show others that we assumed no superior attitude toward manual labour. At first it was extremely trying, but an extra kilogramme of bread a day, and an occasional food parcel, which here, in the camp capital, did not suffer from pilfering, added new strength to our flabby muscles.

Five or six hours' work with a twenty-pound crowbar is excellent training. In the weekly bath, I looked over my own and Yura's biceps with a great deal of satisfaction and reassurance. There is still powder in the old powder-horn!

We agreed that we had an ideal occupation. It could not be improved upon, but the question was, how to make it last. As I have already said, the Third Camp is but a clearing house for transients, and we could not hope to remain there indefinitely.

As always and everywhere in the Land of Soviets, we had to look round for an opening.

## An Opening

Our work had one advantage. At any time I could suspend it for a while and attend to my personal affairs. One of these was: to remain at the Third Camp until the purging was completed.

I went to U.R.O. (the Main accounting and distributing centre of the W.B.C.), to see if anyone was there of the fifty people Yakimenko had brought with him to Podporozhie during the B.A.M. days, who might help me to remain at the Third Camp by managing a simple trick that would throw the red tape and the paper life of the Offices completely out of gear.

Everything went well. From several departments, unknown to each other, I procured mutually excluding requisitions for Yura and myself, in each of which some one important detail was wrong. Names, initials, ages, terms, and specialties were juggled so that no one could make head or tail of it, despite my sincerely double-faced „help” at the U.R.CH. of the First Camp.

„The sons of bitches, they sit there on their posteriors, muddle up things themselves, but, I bet you, they will put the blame on us.”

The personal clerk of our unit No. 3 knew that „us” meant himself, no one else. He shoved a handful of our requisitions under a pile of others on his lame and rickety desk.

„To hell with them. I shall make out no route card for you. Go to the U.R.O. and see to it that they make out a paper that’s right. They muddle the thing up, but if anything goes wrong they will get me by the gills, and throw me into the cooler. Shizo for me, then!”

I understood him perfectly, sympathised profusely, and assured him that I was not the one to blame. We parted, with his assurance that he will not allocate me anywhere until a clear-cut requisition comes through.

„Not if these papers stay here till the end of your term”, he protested.



It never dawned upon him that anyone of the Intelligentsia could consider the Third Camp an almost ideal situation. Needless to say, that he never received any requisition for us.

Our documents were thrown off the paper conveyer of the Camp, and when a paper, the Soviet soul of a man, is lost, the body is lost with it.

So far so good.

There was another curious incident. The 135 per cent of the work norm gave us the right to a 'super-shock' ration of bread and a 'super-shock' dinner. The ration we drew regularly, but the dinner was something unknown.

The right to that dinner, just as many other Soviet rights and privileges, remained a remote contingency. I tried to forget it, like the rest of the favoured few, but Yura persisted.

„A bunch of hair off a mangy cur, at least,” he suggested, and started a 'discussion' with me, to bring me up to scratch, till my eardrums ached, and I gave way.

Overcoming my inertia, I went to see the Commissary. They did not send me to the devil, but hinted in that general direction. I persisted. They underestimated my Soviet experience, my pet and my pride, which usually puts me on my mettle.

So much theory enters into life that anyone can confound his comrades with their own text.

I assured the Commissary that dinners, as such, are of no importance, it is the obstruction of Soviet government policy that matters most. The Commissary set aside that policy by practising equalisation, which smacks of Trotskyism and is, therefore, a 'deviation from the Party line'.

Now we were in a position to discuss the dinners in a new light. There was no question of my going to the devil, nor to his mother, nor anywhere else. The Commissary liked me where I was. An octave lower, they pleaded there are no such dinners, but that, as it appeared, was none of my business. It

was the stimulation, the incentive that mattered. (They lifted their eyebrows at the word.)

The convicts must be stimulated, urged to higher productivity. The 'equalisation' is directly antagonistic to the political ideals and social aims of the Camps.

This took the wind out of their sails completely. We began to get 'extras'; now half a pound of curds, now a smoked fish, or horse sausage. The Commissary looked after us with anxious attention lest we detected some other schism.

## Fluctuation

A few lighter incidents, occurring one after the other, should not give one the idea that life in the Third Camp was all roses. One of the least agreeable thorns was the nocturnal transfer from one barrack to another. Yura recalls seventeen such changes.

Under the Soviets everything is 'flowing', and especially the higher administration. There is even an official term to describe it, 'the fluctuation of the managing personnel'.

If a new broom sweeps clean, a sufficiently frequent change of brooms will keep the dust constantly in the air. Every new appointee knows that he does not understand his duties and that his job is short-lived. It is natural therefore, that changes, so easy to order but hard to execute, present themselves as a spectacular sort of activity which makes a good showing in a report.

So the Assistant Administrators (the dictatorial world over) have to signalise their first steps in office by reform, and prove that they have the precious

life-giving power, but in all the dictatorships, this lacks the principle of personal initiative.

How is comrade Ivan, who understands his new job no better than he understood the old, to indicate that he has the 'enlightened initiative', the creative ability? Yet show this he must!

To do this, his vacant mind slides along the line of least resistance: he re-shuffles his pack. Outside the Camp this is known as a reorganisation of the apparatus, but it goes no further than the re-painting of signs, moving from room to room, from floor to floor, or if the administrator is big enough, even across the street. The nomadic tradition, in an agricultural community, censures a failure to recognise and discharge man's responsibility to the productive soil. This neglect, which the powers of yesteryear instinctively strove to correct by making the peasant 'fast to the soil', persists, in a powerful but not modernised form, throughout the Soviet State, and not only there but abroad.

## I

A friend of mine, a half-German, who is now a prisoner in the W.B.C. Camp, spent three years in the U.S.S.R. 'Torgpred', or Government Trade Agency, at Berlin. The Agency occupied an office building of some four hundred rooms. His section was moved twenty-three times during thirty-two months.

The German business men were at a loss to locate the necessary department, and utterly dumbfounded by the fast tempo of the Socialistic 'fluctuation'. The employees of the Agency were just as much at sea in that Soviet entanglement, and could render no assistance.

Outside the Camp, at large, so to say, one bundles up the papers, moves to a new corner, or room, or floor, or house, and spends a couple of weeks making the best of the familiar excuse: „We have just been moving”.

But in the Camp the position is much more precarious and personal. There may not be any accommodation in the next barrack, while during the transfer one is not certain of one’s destination. It may be another barrack, another Camp, or—thanks to some unknown informer—a long trek to the Lesnaya River Camp, five hundred kilometres north, a grave to all hopes, to all chance of ever emerging alive.

Each incoming chief of a Camp, or head of a column, devises some new combination of men, some novel way of classifying them, some special way of re-billeting his subjects. There is no time for removal during the day. The convicts are working, standing in line for bread, or perhaps eating. But at night:

Sleepy and chilled, one collects one’s poor belongings and, trudging behind the voice in the dark, wonders about the immediate prospects. Often enough, one may be fortunate in losing the escort and returning to the barrack, where one’s place by the stove is inevitably taken by others.

After a few experiences of this character, I decided to change my tactics.

When subsequently the Chief of the Column sought to transfer me in the middle of the night, I told him to go to hell. At first he was taken aback, but soon recovered and displayed his cursing abilities. I did not lag behind, but leant out of the bunk with every appearance of readiness to knock his head off.

He knew me by name but quite probably did not connect it with my personality. I taxed him with undermining Camp discipline by his administrative merry-go-round, and threatened to make it very unpleasant for him in the columns of the Reconstruction (Perekovka), the Camp newspaper and a clearing house for complainants and informers. Medgora was the headquarters of the editorial staff.

The Chief collapsed and left the hut. But he remembered it later.

## The Cabin of Our Friends, the Mechanics

One of the hardest tasks was the sawing and hewing of timber. Somehow, we did manage the cutting, but the sawing was almost beyond our power. I am poorly trained for the monotonous automatic straining of such labour. Moreover, the saw was of Soviet manufacture, it bent over the knots, and its teeth were not properly set. We never could sharpen it properly, and it became blunt after five or six hours' use.

One day while Yura and I were sawing, some workmen passed by: one halted and looked at our bent bodies. He was of diminutive stature, very nimble in his movements, and, as it appeared afterwards, inclined to take life on its comic side.

„So, you are sawing I see, my right honourable gentlemen? Well, go ahead with your sawing. One could saw his own father with such a saw, and there'd be no harm done. Wait, let me have a look at your fine instrument.”

With a mighty effort, I disengaged the saw from the cleft. The workman sighed. „One has to put a tractor on each end to put it in motion, whether it is sawing logs or not, mark my word. Hummm. . . . You wait a bit, and I will show you a saw, a fine one. A saw of the old regime.” He hesitated, looked at us scrutinisingly, then noticed our spectacles. „Oh well, I see that you are not the kind that would steal it. When you have finished, put it back in the cabin.”

He went away and a minute later came back with a saw. He tapped the blade with his knuckle, and indeed it emitted a pure thin tinkle.

„Have a look, how fine it is sharpened,” said he. One could see how true every tooth tapered to a sharp point. The workman put an eye to one end of the saw and looked along the blade, „All the teeth are straight, all in one line!” He gave it to us with the solemn cheerfulness of a man who knows the value of a really fine tool.

„There you have a saw, never mind that it was made under the Tsar’s regime. In the Tsar’s time, they knew how to make saws. Let us say they did it to saw the proletariat in two, so the bourgeoisie could drink the workers’ blood. Hummm. . . . So I am told, my dear comrades. . . . Well, now we have neither Tsar, nor saws, nor firewood. . . . My family is in Leningrad, what they use to warm themselves, nobody knows. Well, good-bye, I am going. If you freeze, come into our cabin to warm yourselves. Our gang is all right, they also were made under the Tsar’s regime. So long.” The work went smoothly, the old saw seemed to work by itself. After a time we sat down to rest. From our pockets we each took a piece of frozen bread and had lunch. Some workmen passed by who offered to help in our sawing just to show us their skill. They did. Indeed, it was skill! The blocks flew from the logs like sparks.

„Any kind of work requires special skill,” said a tall sombre workman sententiously. On his weary face one could notice the characteristic tattoo of a miner, faded blue spots of coal dust embedded in the skin.

„But where did you get that skill?” I asked. „Seems to me you are a miner. Are you from the Don coal mines?” „Why, I was there once. So you noticed the marks on my face?”

I nodded.

„That is true. Whoever once happened to work in the shafts will stay marked for ever.” In this way I made the acquaintance of a ‘hereditary proletarian workman’, Comrade Mukhin. The Revolution had moved him to and fro all over Russia. He was sent, however, to the Concentration Camp from his native city of St. Petersburg. His story is a typical one.

A new drilling machine arrived from the United States. It was a very complicated and delicate piece of machinery of the very latest design. For economy's sake, so as not to enrich the expensive American mechanics and, moreover, to show the foreign bourgeoisie that the Soviets could do it even better, a gang of young Communists undertook to assemble the drill themselves. They boasted that they could do this more expeditiously than any foreign specialists. In fact, they worked like demons. The drill was assembled two or three times faster than American standards could claim. An ill-fated Soviet engineer who was ordered „in the line of duty” to supervise the assemblage, got a ‘premium’ for his quick work. Later I met him in Camp.

So the drill was put to work. Mukhin was appointed as foreman. „I am a wise bird, you know, but, in this case, whenever I tried to make the drill work, nothing succeeded. I did a foolish thing. I thought I'd stay one or two weeks longer and then desert to South Russia. I was too late, damn it!”

The drill broke all at once. After a court trial for ‘wrecking’, the engineer, Mukhin, and some of the work-men were sent to a Concentration Camp. Mukhin got off lightly. He had three years, but the engineer paid heavily.

„That's why I am here. For myself, it isn't so bad, even better than being at liberty. But you see, I had four children. My wife likes to have children.” Mukhin grinned sadly. „Children, I like children myself, but can we afford them in these present times? To make ends meet I worked at the mill for two shifts every day. I came home half dead, the kids were almost starving, myself hungry. . . . Here I eat better than I did then, and there are plenty of private jobs for Soviet chiefs, electrical repairing, etc., they pay for it. So for myself it is all right, but what my family is doing I dare not imagine. . . .”

Next day we were sawing again. From the White Sea and North-Eastern tundras, a keen arctic wind was blowing. Our coats, plus leather jackets, were of little protection against its icy blasts. At times the wind-driven clouds of snow drifts, which penetrated into every slit of our clothing, hid from view the neighbouring houses, the power-station, and the mechanics' cabin adjoining the station. I felt that we should suspend our work and seek

shelter. But where to find it? Yura, jumping from one leg to the other, put his hands under his coat while his face became blue with cold.

An obscure figure, hardly visible in the drifting snow, appeared from the cabin and a voice borne on by the gale, roared, „Hey, master, you will freeze the boy. . . . Come to our cabin. . . . We will give you some tea. . . .”

We rushed to the cabin instantly.

The mechanics appeared to be nice, friendly people; they evidently knew also how to adapt themselves to the most penurious circumstances. Their cabin was simply a small shed made from planks.

There were several bunks and a large table newly planed; on the walls were a few maps, old and tattered, but carefully patched. Pictures of Bolshevik leaders were exhibited in modest numbers, just the requisite golden mean, suggesting neither enthusiasm nor counter-revolution. Adjoining these were some portraits of Russian writers: Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Turgenev, illustrations evidently cut from magazines, with their torn pieces carefully patched. On a shelf were about twenty books and a chess board with home-made chessmen. Special shelves with holes in them bore different tools. The stove was not made of sheet iron, but of bricks, and in it a fire was merrily burning. A large kettle standing on the stove emitted a jet of steam.

All this I observed, however, only when I had removed my spectacles and wiped them; then I also recognised the man who had called us inside. He was the same workman who had lent us the old-regime saw. Now he carefully closed the door after our entry.

„It will not do, master. Let them do the sawing themselves in such weather, the sons of bitches.

Otherwise, look—you have a nose and—bang, you have lost it! What do you think, shall I care more for the government firewood than for my own nose? Let them go to hell. Sit down, warm yourselves. Take off your bushlats, it’s warm here.”



We discarded them. There appeared tea *a la Soviet*, just plain boiling water, no sugar, and not a trace of tea. A dishevelled head arose from a bunk.

„Say, Ivan, did you bring in the men who were sawing?” „Of course I did.”

„It was time. The weather is, I should say, quite Communistic; that is: rotten weather. Did you say tea? I will come at once.”

A man rose from the bunk. He was about thirty-five years of age, small of stature, and with alert, never-say-die eyes. „Well, as we happen to have guests, let me introduce myself formally. Peter Mironovich Sereda, an hereditary proletarian, by profession a mechanic, who hoped to become an engineer, instead I’m sitting here. Article of sentence: 58, paragraph 7 (wrecking). Term—ten years, of which I have spent five. About him,” Sereda nodded toward the owner of the saw, he is called just Lenchik. Also, from the workers’ class. His sentence: article 59, paragraph 3 (banditism). Term—five years. He has luck, our Lenchik, after cutting people’s throats he got only five years.”

Lenchik put a log into the stove, possibly the same log that we had sawn, and wiped his hands on his pants. „All right, let us be acquainted in full form. My name is, however, not Lenchik, but—Lenchitsky. Peter Mironovich is a master in kidding. For simplicity’s sake I am called Lenchik. Do you want some bread?”

We had some bread, so we declined the offer and introduced ourselves also.

„We know you,” said Sereda, „Mukhin has already reported everything about you. Wait, I believe he’s at the door.”

From behind the door there resounded the heavy stamping of feet, knocking of snow from boots; then a couple of men entered the cabin. These were Mukhin and a lad of about twenty or twenty-two years of age. We shook hands; the boy also shook hands and mumbled something unintelligible.

„Listen, Lapwing, when you meet people you must say your name and that of your father<sup>5</sup>. I wonder when you, a Soviet product, will learn the polite ways of cultured people. Were I in the place of your father, I would whip you at every party meeting.” Mukhin wearily laid down his tools. „Lenchik, stop joking for a while,” he said.

„My God, it's only with jokes that one can endure life here. If Sereda and I did not chaff you from early morning every day, you would have hanged yourself long ago. Only our jests save you from a noose. Some people have no gratitude. Let us have some tea.”

We sat at the table. Lapwing gloomily and in silence poured himself a mug of boiling water and then, as though remembering, passed it to me. Lenchik slyly winked. „Look, the lad is learning.” Sereda went to his shelf and took from it a small loaf of white bread, sliced it in equal pieces and put them before each one present. We had not even seen white bread since the time of our arrest by the G.P.U.

Yura looked at his piece, not without longing, but said, „Thanks, comrade, we have our own bread. Thanks just the same.”

„You, young man, don't put on airs,” said Sereda in an imposing manner. „Take example from your seniors; they did not refuse. This bread is earned. I repaired some wiring and got, so to speak, a tip from the lady of some exalted proletarian.”

The mechanics, and in general all the skilled artisans, contrived to do some private work even in the Concentration Camps. Some installed and repaired electric lights in the private apartments of the members of the G.P.U., some manufactured knives, sickles, and even scythes for the neighbouring populace, the materials, of course, being purloined from the government stores. Several practised the so-called „Domestic Barter”, which was conducted in this ay [?]: the mechanics provided the millers with kerosene, pilfered from the power station; the millers supplied the electricians with

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<sup>5</sup> A Russian custom

stolen flour, so the deal was completed to everyone's satisfaction, and there was less hunger. As a result Mukhin could spare all his bread rations; he cut them, and after drying them on the stove, sent these rusks by a clandestine route to his family in Leningrad.

All these workmen lived in friendly relations. They did not try to join the Activists; shunned the spies, and, in general, contrived to survive and even to help others.

Lenchik took his piece of white bread and, supporting Sereda, said, repeating a popular Russian joke: „Just as it is said in the Scriptures; take when they give you, flee when they beat you. Sereda is a wise man. He can dig up edibles where ten others would starve from hunger. As I told you, Solonevich, our fellows were made under the old regime, they are nothing like those the present Soviet make, as, for instance, this one, this Konsomolez,”<sup>6</sup> and he slapped Lapwing on the back.

Lapwing moved mournfully aside. „Stop bantering, Lenchik. Always telling stories about the old regime. Did you not have enough beatings by the police in the old times?”

„Beatings? Beatings? No, sir, I did not happen to get any. Indeed, we became low people, if while drinking, we happened to get into a fight. So I did, so I did. But, my friend, I drank with my own money, the money that I earned. I had money enough for a drink, and I could pay for food in a restaurant and order the musician to play „The Blue Danube” for me. If I got too tight, I took a cab and went home. For two coppers I went like a lord for a distance of two kilometres maybe. That is how it was. Yes, sir.”

„You are just fibbing, Lenchik,” said Lapwing. „Go ahead, if you like, when we are among ourselves. But, darn it, not before new people. Shame on you.”

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<sup>6</sup> Member of the Communist League of Youth

„Our Lapwing,” explained Sereda, „is a fine boy. If he looks a bit fierce, it’s because his brains are not quite clear.

. . . Don’t be snappish, Lapwing, people are speaking who have been something above you. You just sit and listen. It is a pleasure to remember good times even in a Concentration Camp.”

„All right, I will,” said Lapwing sharply. „All of you are for ever praising the old times as if by prearrangement. Now I shall ask an outsider.”

„Go ahead. Ask him. Ask!”

Lapwing fixed upon me a scrutinising look. „Do you remember, comrade, the old times?” „I do.”

„Did you happen to buy food and drinks in the old times?” „I did.”

„These old-timers, they are humbugging me, you see. They agree, of course. Well, let us suppose Lenchik gave me in the old times one rouble (fifty cents, or one hundred kopeks) and he told me to go and buy half a bottle of vodka, a pound of sausages, a loaf of white bread, a herring, a couple of cucumbers, and what more? Well, a packet of cigarettes. Now you tell me how much change I would have left from one rouble.”

Lapwing’s question was put somewhat unexpectedly. „Dash it, how much would it cost? Besides, in the present condition of Soviet Russia it would not do to remember the old times unless in terms of stern official condemnation.” Thus I weakly answered.

Mukhin cast his eye on me with his constantly sad grin. „Don’t be afraid. The boy’s mind is not bright, but he is still all right. He is not a stool pigeon. Don’t you remember . . . half a bottle of vodka?”

„Don’t prompt him. You people have had your joke long enough. Well, mister, tell me how much change there would be.”

I began to reckon on my fingers. „Half a bottle, likely twenty-five kopecks, the sausages also twenty-five (Mukhin nodded approvingly, and Lapwing

then glanced at him suspiciously), a loaf of white bread—five kopecks, a herring —three, the cucumbers— about five kopecks, I think the cigarettes . . . well, after all, you would get something like twenty kopecks back.”

„Save nothing,” Lenchik shouted in delight. „Let’s have a spree. Get two bottles of beer, Lapwing, and put four kopecks change in your pocket. There you are, my little bird!” Abashed, Lapwing looked suspiciously at the company. „Well,” asked Mukhin, „will you say again that we conspired against you?”

Lapwing appeared despondent, but was by no means convinced. „All this is a pack of lies. If there were such prices, no Revolution would ever have occurred. That is quite clear.” „Just such clever ones as you made the Revolution.” „Didn’t you, yourself, join the Revolution?”

„Who, me?”

„Yes, you.”

„There were plenty of other wiseacres besides me,” Sereda replied evasively. „You, Lapwing, to clear your brain, are in need of spending a thousand roubles on drink alone. What a dumb-bell, my goodness!

Pure waste of time to explain anything to him. Just harping about the bourgeoisie, while he does not see a thing right under his own nose.” „So, you are a friend of the bourgeois?”

„Have you ever seen one of them?”

„I have not, but I know everything about them.”

„What a son of a gun you are, Lapwing, that is what I want to tell you. What can you tell me about the bourgeoisie, you blockhead! Listen! A bourgeois lived in a town and kept a shop where he sold, let us say, potatoes. I went to his shop and bought potatoes for three kopecks, just like that, and no worry. Now, there are no more bourgeois, and do you tell me that you did not assist in the compulsory collecting of peasants’ potatoes?”

„I did not.”

„Oh well, then you helped in the compulsory collecting of grain, didn't you? What's the difference?”

„Er . . . I did.”

„Good. Excellent. So it comes to this, that instead of going to a bourgeois, and buying from him five pounds of potatoes for three kopecks—five pounds, mark that.” Lenchik transfixed Lapwing with his forefinger. „Now, our dear esteemed comrade, Lapwing, went to rob a peasant of his potato patch. Then our dear esteemed comrade, Lapwing, is told: „Will you be so kind, for the sake of the party or your Komsomol discipline, to proceed to the railway station to put these potatoes into bags, on one of your spare days. Did this not happen?”

„You, yourself, did the same.” „I did, but I don't boast about it.” „Neither do I.”

„That is good. There is nothing to crow about, my little bird. Nothing at all. The order was to go, so I went, as though anyone dared disobey! Anyway, our Lapwing, after robbing the peasant of his potatoes, loaded them on the railway cars. Of course, some of these Lapwings remained for ever in the fields; the peasants slaughtered them. Then our Lapwing unloaded the potatoes and put them in cellars where they rotted, and after a while Lapwing sorted what remained. In this way our Lapwing was sent here and there, and for all his trouble obtained a food card. By this card he has the right to buy five kilograms of potatoes, only the price will not be three kopecks a pound, but thirty kopecks instead. Not to mention the time he will waste waiting in bread and potato lines. Reckoning all the time one spent, one could earn five railway car loads under the old regime.” „How is that, five car loads?” asked Lapwing.

„Very simple. I am a mechanic. It's my job to stand at a lathe. You calculate how much time I have wasted going on this wretched grain collection compulsory work on off-days, and standing in bread lines. If I had worked

all this time, how many roubles would I have earned, and real gold roubles too? Quite enough for five car loads of potatoes.”

„Ah, why is it that you always measure everything by roubles and kopecks?”  
„Don’t you, yourself, do it just the same?”

„So you prefer to have a bourgeois sitting on your back?” „Have you nobody on your back? Even now, where are you sitting, yourself? If we start talking about somebody’s back, it would be better for you to keep your mouth shut. For what did you get a five years’ term? If in the old times you happened to give a box on the ear to some bourgeois you got a week in the lock-up, and that was all. Now, instead of the bourgeois, you have your party cell. You thrashed some secretary of your cell, and you got five years.

When you are through, they will not let you go home, but you will be sent to some devil’s mother’s corner to be sure. No, Lapwing, if we are speaking about sitting on backs, you are the first who had better keep quiet.”

„If some bourgeois of the old times,” said Lenchik, „had dared sell such potatoes as they give you now at the co-ops, he would have had his dirty mug smeared with his own potatoes, and you can bet on that.”

„Oh, well, we have not everything smooth yet. . . . We have not mastered some of the things. . . .”

„Of course, you could not master. . . . After seventeen years how could you? In seventeen years’ time a monkey could be educated to be a professor. Surely he would be able to sell potatoes. Quite a science. I wonder . . . probably no proper instructions issued, or some special courses were not taken. Very soon we shall forget not only to plant, but how to chew our potatoes.”

Lapwing rose gloomily and took some tools from a shelf, his manner indicating that he was beating a retreat.

„Really, we must drop these arguments,” said Mukhin soberly. „What’s the use of arguing with a man who is deliberately stopping his ears? After two more years of the Concentration Camp, he will be wiser.”

„Who will be the wiser, we shall see. You are for ever looking backward; we are looking ahead.”

„You’ve been doing it all these seventeen years, I should say.”

„Quite right. For seventeen years, and we may have to look ahead seventeen years more. But did we not build plants and mills in that time?”

„Go to hell with your plants and mills,” angrily retorted Sereda. „You built mills! Then why in the name of thunder don’t you go to the Tulom river, where they are building a power station? Why, you son of a bitch? I know. Let them build it, but not on your bones. You are a fool, yet not fool enough to offer your own bones to rot in its building.” There, at the Tulom river, some ten kilometres to the south of the Northern Arctic circle, a power station was under construction. It was, of course, a ‘shock workers’ job, and was actually built ‘on the bones’, and a very large number of bones, I should say. Everyone who could avoid being sent there did his best to remain away. Evidently, Lapwing was one of them. „So you don’t believe I shall go?”

„All right, go, damn you. It would mean one fool less here.”

„What wise people you all are,” Lapwing replied. „In the year 1917 all of you went against the bourgeoisie. Look at you now—without bourgeoisie you are at the end of your wits. Quite like orphans now; where is your nurse? What I would like to know is how you talked about the bourgeoisie in 1917 .

Any fool can nowadays poke fun at the co-ops and Concentration Camps. . . . Wonderfully wise men you are. Where were your brains when you started the Revolution?”

Lapwing put the tools in his pocket and went out. Mukhin winked at me.

„A strong argument, I should say. All the same, it’s not fair, all of us against one.” There was a hint of discontent in Mukhin’s tone, and not without



malice he looked at Sereda. „Really, who ever made the Revolution, it's for the Lapwings to pay for it. Besides, they are at the end of their rope.”

„W-e-l-l,” drawled Sereda, as though defending himself. „In 1917 we really. . . . The World War, of course. . . . All right, we happened to be the fools at the time, but after all that is no reason to remain fools for ever. High time to become wiser.”

„After a while, when Lapwing is as old as you are, he will see for himself. But it is wrong to harp at him all the time, calling him a fool. At his age, who is not a fool?”

„By the way, what kind of a fellow is this Lapwing of yours?” I asked. „Are you sure he is not making reports to the G.P.U.?”

„Oh, yes, most assuredly, yes,” Sereda hastily replied, as though he was relieved to change the topic. „Lapwing is a son of a friend of Mukhin. Mukhin found Lapwing here and befriended him. Lapwing happened to thrash some secretary of a party cell and got five years in the Camp. Without Mukhin he would be quite lost.” Sereda frowned as though trying to remember something. „For such as Lapwing this Soviet life is the worst; their brains are not yet developed, they lack experience, they believe implicitly in any kind of Soviet propaganda. They really believe that here is the kingdom of the workers. For the time being he has already been given five years for defending his rights in this party cell of Komsomols. If he ever tries to do anything of that kind here in the camp, he will be lost.

You, Mukhin, are wrong in taking his part. No one wants to offend Lapwing. But the boy must keep his eyes wide open. If, in 1917, somebody had told us as plainly as two and two make four, what fools we were, and the kind of trap we were laying for ourselves, we would not be here in this Camp.” „Tell, me, Sereda, would you have listened in 1917 to such an argument?” I asked.

„That's just the point,” he muttered vaguely.

## Public Relations

We spent many hours in the cabin, taking shelter from snowstorms, or in invitations to tea. Very soon we established relations with our hosts, such as may be deemed normal for the sensible part of the Intelligentsia and the intelligent section of the Proletariat.

The Proletariat played their part in their own way. Our cross-cut saw was always available and in excellent working condition; we were warned of a change in commandants, and of an impending inspection of the work quota. The new commandant, a 'free employee', came to check the fantastic 135 per cent of the quota, which was almost the average of everyone in the cabin, and having seen for himself, tried to banish his base suspicions by a vague explanatory:

„You see, if a man is educated . . .”

Why an educated man is expected to complete a norm, too hard even for a skilled professional sawyer, is not clear. But our 135 per cent was checked and officially found correct, which was all that mattered.

In relief, Lenchik, who anxiously followed the procedure, thumbed his nose to the commandant's back:

„Eh, fiddlesticks, if we could, all of us, like the fingers of one hand,” he opened and closed his palm, „stand together, we would show this rabble what's what. . . .”

„Yes,” Yura remarked, gloomily, „the rabble knows that better than you, or I.”

„That is nothing, young man, you know history. Remember the feudal princes, and how everyone was for himself until the Tartars came. But when they set about it all together, then the Tartars knew it.”

„True,” acknowledged Yura, „but the Tartars stayed for three hundred years.”

„Why, yes, three hundred is right” Lenchik conceded, „but now, with the new Socialist tempo. . . .

And the people, of course, are different. . . . No, they cannot stay long. . . .” The workmen assisted us with their physical power, and we, on our side, supplied the cabin with our ‘accumulated intelligence’. This is particularly necessary now that the Russian masses have gone so far „off the rails”.

To whom will a peasant apply for information regarding, let us say, the fertilising of his vegetable garden? To the Activists? But the Activists are there not for help but for requisitions, and have established themselves for that purpose. Who will talk to the workmen about his pension, for instance, or about moving to another locality, about his housing problem, or avoiding the ‘mobilization’ for something, or other? To the Professional Union worker? The worker is but a driving belt from the party to the masses, and it is driving hard.

In short, the peasant goes to the village Intelligentsia, professedly non-party, the workman goes to the city or town Intelligentsia, but preferably to the counter-revolutionary.

Both the peasant and the workman eagerly converse with a good, intelligent man about politics of the obscurer kind, they like to find a flaw in the Kolkhoz Trade Law—that in every law there must be one, goes without saying—or about the Japanese, and what kind of people they are, or about the Americans, the war, and so forth.

All these questions are discussed in the Soviet Press, but the Press occupies such an ‘exclusive’ position, that no one, not even the party members, believe it, even when it does not lie.

In a Camp arise a number of peculiar problems, like the one raised by Mukhin. His family remained at Petrograd and was deprived of its passport because of his arrest. Where are they to turn? Everything is full to

overflowing, famine is spreading everywhere. No matter where they go, they will have to stay for weeks at the railway stations, in boxcars or out in the open, or literally huddle themselves against a fence, because of the housing shortage.

Every factory will ask Mukhin's wife why she left Petrograd, and where is her passport? It is natural that, in such difficulties, Mukhin will never apply to the legal adviser, nor to the cultural-educational section. They are too alien to him. They are the new order, that sent him into camp. I, on the other hand, could give Mukhin good advice. His wife must avoid provincial towns, and move towards the Turkestan or Persian frontiers, where there are few Russians, and no one bothers about passports. There is Pishpec or Makhach-Kala. At Pishpec she can find a certain Ivan Ivanovich, who is probably still working in the Sheep-trust or somewhere in the vicinity.

He will surely find a way to convey her to the opium Sovkhoz at Karakola, or the sheep Sovkhoz on the Kachkor.

She will have to live in a yurt (a felt tent of Central Asia and Mongolia), but they will not perish from hunger.

All this is what we call in Russia, 'life's prose'. But there are other questions which, while not quite so urgent, demand an answer. There is the old Russian literature, for instance, which is much in request and is read with avidity till the pages of the books fall out, or almost revert to the wood-pulp stage. A volume becomes a mass of patches, tape, tissue-paper; pages ready to breathe their last, and pencil copies of passages that are no longer legible.

The Marxian literary output is familiar to everybody; it is as dry as the desert and as monotonous as sand; no one credits it, although it has improved. But as long as 'they' write it, it is not worth reading.

So in multitudinous ways and for countless reasons is being evolved a new consciousness of the people.

## The Kulak Akulshin

Spring approached, and all our brigades were mustered to remove the garbage and other accumulated filth from the many yards of the W.B.C. while it was still frozen and more or less odourless.

We of the Third Camp have to present a united front to the advancing spring, and move the mounds outside the sniffing radius of the administration.

Just before that time, Yura wormed his way into another occupation. Half-way between Medgora and the Third Camp was, in the course of construction, the building of some new technical institution, and the future principal lived there in a half-finished room. My long-headed offspring hung round the building with a view to entering it later, as a student. Of which, anon[?].

I, however, decided to remain near headquarters, as from there I could more easily obtain the information I wanted from the different bureaux. This I determined upon, even if I had to become a scavenger or helper to a peasant driver. This worthy was a largish man of about forty-five, with pockmarked features and dour countenance. Our job was to break out the garbage boxes from under the overflow, and to remove the contents to whatever distance was considered out of bounds. We carried crowbars, shovels, and a sled for moving equipment. He did not seem to rate my help very highly, for which I cannot blame him, although I probably possessed more strength than he did. My city-bred athletic endurance, however, was not worth a rush in comparison with his country-bred and work-hardened power. He wielded the twenty-pound crowbar by the hour. I, on the other hand, could not last more than half an hour at a time. Moreover, garbage removal was not in my curriculum.

The moujik was silent, but his grunts and expression said plainly enough: „This is not for you; I'll manage if you just get from under my feet.” It was humiliating to appear an amateur supernumerary under a master craftsman.

After a while, my master craftsman broke out the three sides of a box and uncovered a cake of ice of about 500 lb. weight. It was cracked along the middle and he deftly cut it in twain. I offered to move the halves on to the sled without breaking them further, thus saving all shovelling.

The moujik smiled tolerantly, as if he thought: „Listen to the man who talks of something he knows about.”

„Let's try.”

„All right, you try.”

I squatted, found purchase, and gathering momentum slid the cake on to the sled, and then the other half.

„Well I'll be damned!” said the moujik in astonishment, and realising that the ice was broken in more senses than one, he asked, „How long have you worn glasses?” „About thirty years.”

„Hm. What's the matter with you? Well, let's light up.” We rolled a couple of cigarettes and smoked as we marched along. We could not sit on the sled, since it would involve an additional year in Camp, if we were detected. The horse traction was a weak, and therefore a sore spot in the Camp transport. Horses were hard to get and harder to replace. Not so with men.

The usual amenities of a Camp self-introduction sound like a questionnaire. Name, term, paragraphs, how long in Camp, what of the family outside, and where. These questions disclosed that the peasant Akulshin had been sentenced to ten years for resistance to collectivisation.

The entire village was sent away to Siberia, sans cattle, sans implements. He, one of the secondary ringleaders, got ten years. The leading men were shot on the spot.

Somewhere in Siberia roams his family: a wife (a treasure of a woman), and six children (likable children, wouldn't vex God with their complaints), ages from three to twenty-five. Where is the town of Barnaul, and what is beyond it? „Wild taiga” I explained. „Vast stretches of pine forest.” „That's where they are. We agreed long ago that that is where we will all go. My wife wrote me that they are beyond Barnaul.” He finished lamely, with something sad on his mind, and fell silent.

The next day our friendship progressed a little.

„To hell with the garbage,” he suggested, „there is no control over it, and no norm. Nobody knows how much there is of it. Time now for a smoke.”

We unloaded, sat down, got out the makings, smoked and talked. We touched upon mineral fertiliser (a fine thing, but we haven't any!); upon the Japanese (they'll get as far as Barnaul. Won't they be glad, our Siberians!); upon Sovkhoz (moujiks complained of the landlord, and now to hell with him, as long as we can save our own hide!); and back to Barnaul (what sort of a country around it, and how far is it?).

I took out a note-book and sketched a map: Murmansk Railway, south to Moscow, east to Ural mountains, the Trans-Siberian Railway, and southward, the Altai spur of the railway. „Yes—no. A bit far. The main thing is the grub. I'll get the grub,” he soliloquised, and checked himself; he had said too much. He shrugged, smiled artificially, and looked at me sideways. „That's how one puts his foot in it. One thinks, and thinks of something, and then it slips one's tongue.”

„I won't let mine slip,” I assured him, „neither for myself, nor for the others.”

„Let's hope not. In these times one cannot be sure of one's own father. But now, since it is out, never mind. My family is in the taiga, and there is no sense for me to stay here.” „How will you find them in the taiga?” I asked.

„There is a way we agreed on.”

„How about food and money for flight?”

„We don't need all that. We are from the Ural mountains. Once in a forest, we are at home.” Thus he generalised upon his countrymen. „Then I'll hook on to a train.” „But you will need money and provisions.”

„Well, I have these friends.”

He smiled and looked at his hands; closed a fist, so that the veins stood out with the muscles knotted.

„This is not so simple,” I argued.

„Nothing simpler. There is plenty of that rabble travelling with brief-cases and revolvers. Take one by the gills, and— finish him.”

Among my varied Soviet professions was an instructorship in boxing and judo. In order to meet a pressing necessity, I had to devise a combination of both and, when it passed, I made it pay dividends to me by becoming an instructor to the ranking members of the militia, the police, and for that end published a textbook.

The book was immediately confiscated by the G.P.U., and I was requested, in a very unequivocal manner, to surrender even the author's copies, which order I obeyed, almost to the letter.

Akulshin did not know that ten thousand copies of that ill-starred manual had fallen into the hands of the G.P.U. and the 'Dynamo'. He did not know that a grip by the throat is far from being as final an argument as it seems.

„Nothing is easier,” he insisted.

„You try,” I offered, „I will show you.”

He did, and in a second was down on the snow, helpless.

The next hour of our working time was devoted to the study of the ancient and noble art of a silent liquidation of one's betters, in a form too advanced



for my book. Soon I was completely out of breath, but Akulshin was as fresh as a daisy.

„Yes, that’s what I call education,” he drawled. „Why, education?”

„Strength I have, but no science. A people without education is like an army with company commanders but no soldiers, and companies of soldiers without company commanders. Anyone who has a mind to, can give them a trouncing. The comrades thought it all out very well. The educated are as if armless and legless, and we, we are headless.

. . . No organisation.”

„What we have, we do not cherish; Having lost, we wellnigh perish,” I ironically quoted.

He pretended not to hear me.

„Take us, peasants. You, in the cities, started it, of course. But even now, we cannot get along without you. There is enough of us, we could have won with axes, but we have no organisation. How many uprisings had we in the Ural mountains? But they all started piecemeal. One village rises and others do not even know about it, and wait. When one is put down, another rises and the same detachment of G.P.U. discharges the machine-guns and puts them down.

## Sports organisation of the G.P.U.

It has gone on now, for how many years? We have no commanders. We are scattered to the four winds. We shall survive, of course, but it is a sorry business, all the same.” I looked at Akulshin’s square shoulders and his

determined jaw, and inwardly agreed that this one will not perish, but such as he are not the rule.

One could easily reconstruct his biography from the fragments of information one gleaned from our first conversation. All his life this moujik had worked like a machine, just as he toiled with the crowbar yesterday; and working steadily, purposefully, and soberly, he could not help achieving the results that others, less industrious, failed to accomplish. This industry, enterprise, and courage qualified him for the character of a class enemy: the kulak (the 'fist', the Russian 'E pluribus unum').

He, and those like him, did not outwork the Soviet community. It was the community who out-lazed, out-drunk, out-slept, and out-procrastinated him. He took nothing of theirs, but the community refused to acknowledge that. Their mentality did not view wealth as a product of labour but as something to be seized from, if slightly shared with its peasant creators.

When their time came, the organised pessimists sent him to the Camp.

But even in Camp he will get the upper hand, for he is as strong as a giant oak, in both mind and body.

I recall 'kulaks' I saw near Archangel, on the White Sea, in Svanetia, in the Caucasus; and in Pamir, in Central Asia. They were exiled, forcibly re-settled or simply 'gone West', which is East in Russia, in search of a milder political clime.

At Archangel they were disembarked from the G.P.U. trains with nothing but what they wore, and set 'free'. Their old and their young died out rapidly; the rest took life by the throat, and toiled. In a year or two they were kulaks again, common carriers, lumber-men, fishermen—top-booted and fan-bearded—till another 'de-kulakising'.

In Kirghizia, far beyond Lake Issyk-Kul, in an absolutely barren region, the exiled kulaks engage in various primitive industries, from smelting lead from some long-abandoned ore deposits to smoking mountain brook-trout, and catching birds with home-made nets. All their implements are as

primitive as before the Flood. They live in branch-covered earth huts, and they have established friendly relations even with the neighbouring Basmaches (a marauding band of Mongolian Nomads who remain chronic enemies of the Soviets).

In Svanetia the kulaks are better organized. They form co-operative crews and work precious wood, like samshit—boxwood—for export. They trade with the Soviets, as the latter put it, 'on the basis of barter and exchange', but maintain their own machine-gun commandoes. The Soviets accept the wood, deliver the manufactured goods, but keep out of the mountains, and pretend that everything is as it should be.

This is what I have witnessed myself. My friends, members of numerous expeditions, geographical, geological, botanical and other, have told me things much more astounding. These expeditions are now very numerous. For their members it is a respite from Soviet life, and for the Soviets it serves as a way for making a deep reconnaissance into the uncharted backwoods of the country, which are almost unknown; for the State, it is a cheap way of cataloguing the potential mineral, and other resources, which are enormous. I was told of large villages, hidden in taiga, surrounded by look-out posts, at whose signal the entire village disappears in the thick of the taiga. The armed detachment discovers only the empty huts, but seldom escapes alive. The villagers have American gramophones, and Japanese rifles and manufactured goods. From what I gather, Akulshin's family live in some such village.

He will take some Chekist by the throat to capture his rifle; he will skirt the Onega Lake, bearing east, toward Ural. I could not have undertaken the trip, but Akulshin can. He knows the forest like his own home; he will find food where I would die of hunger; he will find his way, where I would be lost.

The lesson in ju-jitsu made me an accessory before the fact in the murder of some unwary Chekist, but that interested me little. I was thinking of securing weapons for my own escape. Besides, Akulshin was my countryman and a brother in misfortune. No, I was decidedly not concerned in the life or death of any Chekist.

„Well, before we see the life of plenty,” Akulshin remarked heavily, „let’s go and cart out the dung, for the life of plenty is still far away.”

## Class Struggle

One day we were emptying our malodorous load in the woods, about two miles from Medgora. At this time a high, cold north-easter raged, which now became a storm. The tall pines swayed and creaked; clouds of snowflakes rose and powdered the trees and ground. There was an urgency in the air that excused us from all work, except that of getting home. Akulshin was making time, and no sooner had we unloaded than a low, anxious hum spread over the forest: *purga*, the local snow-storm, was approaching. In a few minutes everything disappeared in the white driving cyclone of heavy snowflakes. We could not see ten paces away.

Bent and groping, we picked our way back to Medgora. In the open, the wind almost threw us off our feet. If it were not for Akulshin, I would have been lost and frozen. He led the snorting, frightened horse by the bit, now feeling with his foot for the rut of the road, now falling back upon God only knows what resources of woodcraft.

We reached Medgora an hour later, and I was chilled to the bone. Akulshin was quite solicitous; he wanted me to rub my ears and even sit on the sled, since nobody could see me. This offer I refused for fear of being frozen.

Finally we reached the bank of the River Kumsa, which went through the administrative town, from which point to the Third Camp we still had four more miles to go. We could not think of continuing our toil.

I wished to seek shelter at the electricians’, but Akulshin refused, not wanting to leave his horse unattended. I persuaded him to put it up in a shed, behind the cabin.

„Don't go in without me,” he pleaded, „wait till I see to the horse; it doesn't do for me, a stranger, to go in alone.” I waited. Akulshin unspanned and unharnessed the horse, put her in, rubbed her down with straw, and covered her with some gunny sacking; I stood there, numb with cold, anathematising him for being a sentimental peasant. The horse playfully and gratefully nibbled his dirty, torn sleeve, while he got together a handful of straw. For him the animal was not merely 'live stock' and traction power, but a living being and a working mate.

How could a man like this avoid becoming a kulak? How could he help becoming a beam in the eye of any Solkhoz, Kolkhoz, or other Socialistic undertaking?

In the cabin, to my surprise, I found Yura. He had abandoned the building job, where he worked as a carpenter, and now coached Lapwing in trigonometry. Akulshin greeted both of them ceremoniously, asked permission to warm himself, and went over to the stove. I wiped my glasses clean and discovered that, apart from Yura and Lapwing, the cabin was empty. The latter began to clear away the papers, but Yura checked him. „Hold it, Sasha. We will mobilize the older generation to wrestle with trig. Dad, we need you for consultation.”

There was a quarter of a century old rust on my trigonometry while Yura, on the contrary, had studied recently in Germany, which accounted for a discrepancy in terminology which I was to remove.

Lapwing thanked me shyly.

„Yura almost took me under his wing in mathematics,” he explained, „our old men here are also studying, but they don't know much, either.”

Akulshin turned around for an instant.

„That's fine, my lads, that you can study even in Camp. Education is a great thing. The educated are never lost.”

I remembered Professor Avdeyev, of the Pogra, and expressed my doubt of that sweeping statement, but Yura silenced the budding argument: they had little time for study, and valued it.

Akulshin faced the stove again, and I rummaged on the bookshelf. A few popular books on electricity and mathematics, a thick volume on the Resistance of Materials, half a dozen un-cut brochures on the Five Year Plan, Gladkov's Cement, two volumes of Tolstoy's War and Peace, a meagre remnant of Dostoyevsky's Brothers Karamazov, the Economical Geography of Russia, and Goncharov's Frigate Pallada.

I picked up this last. The old man, Goncharov, travelled cosily and wrote cosily. Behind all the storms that tossed him on earth and at sea, one could feel Russia. In Russia—St. Petersburg, there was his home, and in it the dependable, the immutable—his own hearth. His own hearth, personal and national, to which he could turn at any time.

Propped up in the bunk, I held the familiar book. I did not have to open it, it spoke to me without my reading it.

Where are we, Russians of to-day, to turn? We, who live on the „border-line of two worlds”? We are homeless in either, except that in the realm of refuge the homelessness is more poignant. In it I have no country, although I have a dwelling, from which, unless I kill or steal, nobody will take me and place me in solitary confinement, or dispatch me to my fathers. In the other, I have neither country, nor home. I am homeless, like a wild hare. Wherever darkness overtakes me, I burrow down, to sleep through a restless night, and again prick up my ears in fear for mobilisations, arrests, and hunger for myself and mine. The fear of losing my 'living space'—my lair; of Yura being sent to wheat-requisitions, where he might get a bullet from armed kulaks; Boris, shot for boy-scouts' political sins; my wife, mobilised for cultural work among the miners on a Russian concession on the Island of Spitzbergen; and for myself, 'framed', falsely accused of sabotage, wrecking, counter-revolution, or some other sinister thing.

My wife was 'mobilised' as an interpreter for a foreign delegation. She travelled and interpreted under control. The delegation delivered its speeches and went home, where one of the members, who, unknown to us, spoke Russian, reported unfavourably on the way their speeches were translated. My wife was called to the G.P.U. and third-degreed.

She was allowed to go, while they would 'see about it', but we spent a few very uncomfortable weeks. No telling when 'they' would come!

Yes, it was quite different with Goncharov. He lived a real, substantial life. Maybe that is the reason why his book is so well thumbed?

At the time when I served with the Professional Union of Clerical Employees, as I have said before, I was in charge of sport. I know sport and enjoy it. Suddenly I was put in charge of chess, which I do not know and dislike for reasons purely 'ideological': chess was used to divert the club members' minds from politics, just as the fox-trot is used now. Still later, being the only man in this Union with higher education, I was put in charge of libraries, about the management of which I knew less than nothing.

There were seven hundred that were stationary and nearly two thousand travelling ones. Among other useful things, we ascertained the popularity of different authors.

Like the rest of Soviet statistics, ours was a real, living picture expressed in figures and graphs, but warped out of all reliability by the 'must show' orders. The report 'must' show this, or that, whether it is there to be shown, or not. Sometimes it is possible to grasp the subject-matter of a statistical report, below the superstructure of the 'must show', and sometimes it is not.

Our figures were expected to, and did show in their reading order, or popularity: first, the political literature; second, the Anglo-Saxons; third, Tolstoy and Gorky; fourth, Soviet authors; and lastly, the Russian classics.

For my personal use and delectation I began to pare the official figures to an approximation of reality, but even then there remained a wide gap between them.

After numerous talks with librarians, the truth was out: a Soviet reader who takes out a book by Dostoyevsky or Goncharov cannot help but fail to return it.

It always happened to me, but I did not generalise on my own experience. I would take a book from a library and a book-borrowing friend would borrow it from me, starting a chain.

For example, a certain Maria Ivanovna came to see me and saw, let us say, *Brothers Karamazov* on my table.

„Ivan Lukianovich, darling, just for two days. . . . You are busy, anyway. . . . I shall bring it back myself the day after to-morrow without fail. You don't have to worry, for you know you can depend upon me. Only for two days, by God, only two days.”

Five days later I call for it.

„So sorry, Ivan Lukianovich, but Vania called . . . and he saw . . . and he begged. . . . Well, you know, how can one refuse? Our younger generation is so little acquainted with the classics! Oh, you don't have to worry, I shall go myself and take it back.”

A week later I went to Vania. He greets me effusively:

„I know, I know, you are after that Dostoyevsky. Yes, I have read it from start to finish. Great stuff!

These old chaps knew their business all right, the bastards; knew how to write. But, tell me, why did the old man . . .”

An hour later the literary discussion is narrowed down to the book proper, its probable whereabouts.

Its fate is an unpredictable minor matter, and hardly a subject for polite conversation.

„Sonya has it,” and forestalling my protest, „what sort of a bourgeois do you think I am, to hold back a book from a girl. Books are only made to read.



Now don't flare up, you won't lose it. You may be easy, as soon as she finishes reading it I will bring the book back myself, she won't eat it."

My patience is exhausted, I go to the library and pay for the book and the accumulated fine.

A year later the book may be up north, at the construction of Port Igarka, or down south on the cotton fields of Uzbekistan. But neither the librarian, nor the statistician will ever see it again, nor will it ever become an entry in a statistical report.

So, more or less peaceably, live side by side the two systems of purveying spiritual fare to the masses: the mighty network of the Professional Unions libraries, responsible for the Soviet approved „demand" for their books, and—the classics.

„You have not read the *Hydroeenfral* [?]?" gushes the trained librarian. „Don't fail to read it, right now. It is colossal, amazing."

Nobody gushes over the classics. They are viewed with condescension, permitted but not encouraged.

They are not reprinted, because of the shortage of paper.

Lately, Saltykov-Shchedrin, a favourite of the 90's and at the break of the century, a political satirist in a fable-teller's guise, came under the G.P.U.'s special disfavour for his stories of the then 'pompadours' of the petty officialdom and oppression, which have now lost their anachronism.

Some of the Soviet writers are partly recognised and half frowned upon. The libraries were forbidden to carry any of the works of Essenin, almost everything by Ehrenburg (despite his present kow-towing), almost all Pilniak; the *Ulialaevshchina* and the *Tushtorg*, by Selvinsky; the *Twelve Chairs* and the *Golden Calf*, by Ilf and Petrov; and the rest of the kind.

The Bolsheviki vaguely feel that they must have their own lyric poets and satirists, otherwise where will Stalin's golden age of letters be, but the masses should be kept away from them.

The illegal, the clandestine literature, circulates in hectograph copies—the now practically unknown, but coming Russian classics like Kryjanovsky (not to be confused with the member of the Central Committee of the Party), who write for the good of their souls, or like Selvinsky, or yours truly, who write with the right hand for the good of the soul, and with the left for the ever-needed daily bread. There are illegal reading clubs, where the members, braving exile, make up a purse and buy everything in the least unofficial.

A very definite, clear-cut position is occupied by political literature. It is published in million copy issues—hence the paper shortage—and sent to all reading libraries, there to be piled up, unpacked, and un-cut, a dead weight on the library budget.

And what about statistics? The matter is thus:

The librarian, poor soul, has a post to retain, and a part of it is the preparation of reports which will show that the highest demand is for Soviet literature. Every library instructor, like myself, is personally interested in demonstrating the ‘Soviet way of running things’. Every Professional Union is vitally and shamelessly interested in proving, on paper, to the Central Committee of the Party that their cultural-educational work is on a ‘Stalinist footing’.

Thus the librarian lies; I lie; the Professional Union lies; the Press lies, and the poor corridors of Time echo our lies. You can hear the echo abroad. Everyone concerned knows the nature of the thing, and aids and abets it. Like the three-headed Nikko monkey, we see everything, we hear everything, we say nothing, but by degrees we grow to know everything, and especially the value of—‘Statistics’.

The same holds true for the kolkhoz harvest, iron and steel production, coal-mine yield, tractor overhauling, and other statistical unrealities. God save me from all Soviet ‘Statistics’.

## Knowledge Before Everything

Yura drew me away from my musing over Goncharov for another mathematical consultation, in the course of which I discovered that Lapwing had very vague ideas of fundamental algebra and geometry.

The tangents were entangled with the logarithms, the logarithms were obscuring the powers, while the good old Russian 'kh' was constantly and unnecessarily referred to as the foreign 'x'—'iks'. Some formulas were learned by heart, but there was no relation, or connection between them.

It was a pleasant surprise to find out that, no matter how well forgotten my high-school mathematics, I could recall, or logically figure out almost everything. I started to deliver to Lapwing, and in passing to Yura, an adult homily on the advantage of systematic learning, as demonstrated by the recall of something which was learned a quarter of a century ago and had remained dormant ever since.

Lapwing met my remarks with a show of irritation.

„Why tell me all this? As if I do not know it myself! It was all right for you to study. All you had to do was to stick your nose in a book, and no other worry. And we are bobbing up and down like muck in an ice-hole: industrial work, Komsomol tasks, Professional Union tasks, the Saturday voluntary work, and what not. We have to tear the time out from all that with our teeth! Study for a month, get an assignment somewhere in a village, and when you are back you have to start all over again. And no grub! I've listened enough to your old regime fairy tales, cut them out.”

I countered that I had had to earn my own bread since I was fifteen, that I passed my exams, as an extramural student, that I worked my way through the University, and that I was not an exception.

Lapwing did not hide his distrust, but he did not argue.

„There is no more old regime, so you can tell anything you please about it. The ruling class was well off, no doubt, but the toiling masses. . . .”

Akulshin coughed.

„The toiling masses,” he said, still looking into the stove, „did not spend their time in Concentration Camps, and did not die of hunger. There was a road open to everyone, wherever one wanted to go, from a factory to a university.” „So you are going to tell me that a peasant lad could go to a university if he wanted to?”

„Of course. That is what I am telling you, and it was so, hard as it is to believe. And where goes your peasant lad to-day? To a kolkhoz, where he has nothing to eat?”

„And why not to a kolkhoz?” cried Lapwing, stung to the quick.

„So that the likes of you would boss him,” disdainfully answered Akulshin. „The whole government and power is vested in fools, dumb-bells, lazybones, criminals, and drunkards, they are in the saddle, and for fifteen long and bloody years we have not been able to get away from starvation!”

„Starvation, indeed! Do you think that the city workmen are not starving? And whom are we to thank for starvation? The wreckers who slaughter their cattle, the sons of bitches, the damned kulaks who . . .”

„Kulaks?” Akulshin’s moustache bristled. „Did the kulaks ruin Russia, or the comrades with revolvers, terror, and Concentration Camps? The likes of you, you bastard, you snotty-nosed son of a bitch, you careerist, you damned Activist!”

Lapwing could take everything else as a sign of the speaker’s sincerity, but an ‘Activist’ was different. It was personal.

„Listen,” he said in icy tones, „if you came to warm yourself, go ahead, but for the word ‘Activist’ you may have your face slapped.”

„Who will do the slapping?” Akulshin rose and took a step. „You, and who else?” Lapwing jumped up. Akulshin’s face was set in inveterate hatred to Activists of any description, and in Lapwing he detected, with certain justification, a degree of Activism. The term ‘Activist’ or ‘vidvijenets’ (promoted worker), had finally upset Lapwing’s none too stable nervous equilibrium.

In present-day Soviet Russia this is a very caustic term indeed, and its efficacy, for the time being, surpasses even that of an open charge concerning liberties taken with the listener’s maternal parent.

Things looked like a fight. Yura jumped up.

„Stop this!” he began, but the time for peacemaking had passed. Akulshin politely brushed him aside, fixed Lapwing with a leaden stare, and suddenly caught him by the throat.

Cursing myself for the recent jiu-jitsu lessons, I threw myself between them. But suddenly the door opened, and Lenchik and Sereda stepped into the cabin. The former’s reaction was unexpected.

„Hooray!” shouted he at the top of his lungs. „A sweet little fight! A worker-peasant love embrace, hooray! That’s what I like. . . . Slap him, pater, on the seat. Show him, pater, where crawfish winter. . . .”

I was tugging desperately at Akulshin’s middle; he released Lapwing and stood there, breathing heavily through the nose, and hating him with a hate so terribly intense that it completely excluded him from the rest of us.

„So . . .” croaked the contorted Lapwing, „the whole damned gang of you. . . .”

There was no „whole gang”, and what there was of us, was on his side, but we understood that by „whole gang” he embraced the entire, elusive, intangible ‘old world’, which he had never seen, never known, but was called upon as a youth of the movement to annihilate, and which, he now realised, so stubbornly refused annihilation.

„So you act as under the old regime,” he hissed.

„Under the old regime, Lapwing, my dicky-bird,” chattered Lenchik, „you would not be in a Camp, there would not be a Camp, but if necessary your worthy parent, God rest his soul, would double you up across his knee and wallop you so severely that your backside burned!”

That finished Lapwing completely. He took a flying leap at the shelf of instruments and, with shaking hands, tugged at a chisel, stuck in its nest.

„I’ll show you . . . I’ll show you,” he jabbered, out of control. ‘„So across his knee, I’ll show you over the knee.” Yura squeezed between him and the shelf and tried to reason with him.

„Listen, Sashka, be reasonable,” Yura pleaded. „Didn’t you join the grain requisitions?” „So you are against me, too?” Lapwing smarted under this betrayal by his own generation. „You pup, if they insist on sending you, what can you do? Hide in your mother’s skirts? And how the devil did you get an education in Berlin, if not through my grain requisitions?”

That was substantially true and a decided score for Lapwing.

„I am not talking about myself, and it does not make it any easier for Akulshin, that you were compelled to go,” retorted Yura.

„Hold your peace, boys,” rang out Sereda. „Listen, pater, I know you; you worked in the Third Carpenter Brigade, did you not?”

„Well, I did,” acknowledged Akulshin uneasily, „and what of it?” „You were building that new shizo, the penal isolator?”

„I was.”

„They made you, didn’t they?”

„What do you think? Would I do that of my own free will?”

„What, then, is the difference? They made this lad requisition your wheat. He did. They made you build a prison, maybe for him. You did.” Sereda spat

furiously. „Did any of us ask to be allowed to sit here? You ought to be ashamed, you sons of bitches, may the devil take all of you. For seventeen years they clout Lapwing on the head with a peasant, and with Lapwing cut the peasants' guts out. Isn't that enough. Do you still have to fly at each other's throats in your own time and of your own free will? My God, what fools! Instead of getting wise, you have nothing to do but poke each other in the face! And you, pater, are old enough to know better.”

Yura, meanwhile, quietly consoled Lapwing, who was still distraught.

„Ah, t'hell with them. They started it, and now they blame me for it. I did not start the Revolution, and I did not set up the Soviets. But now that they are set up, where am I going to live? Can't go to America.” Pointing to Yura, he went on: „All right for him, the big baboon, he can jabber in three languages, but what about me? If your old regime was so fine, then you must have had fat in your brain, you numbskulls, and a revolution was all your jaded nerves needed. And now I must work myself cross-eyed for a hunk of co-op bread, pay with my last ounce of strength for education.” He was becoming delirious again. „Why did you get me by the throat, you son of a bitch? Just because you have strength?

Just because I have seen nothing but ration bread, now and then? Just because you still have that beef in you, you think you can strangle me like a pup ? All right, may your mother throw a litter, strangle, all of you, strangle me, a dumb-bell, an Activist. I've no strength to go on, strangle me. . . .”

Sereda said harshly to Akulshin, „You, pater, ought to be more careful. Perhaps your son is wandering somewhere now. You, at least, have seen some decent life in your youth, but they have nothing. What have they seen? What are you talking about—that they helped at the requisitions of peasants' crops? Could they refuse? It was not on account of a nice life that they did it. Look at him. Were you like that at twenty? At twenty were you in a Concentration Camp? One must help the lad, instead of wringing his neck.”

„To help, you say,” sneered Lapwing. „Just how much did you help me?”

„Don't talk nonsense, Sasha. Of course, sometimes it was rough on you. Yet it was Mukhin who pulled you out of the barracks, brought you to this cabin to live. You learn a trade here. Yura teaches you mathematics, comrade Solonevich tells you about Russian literature. After all, it shows we wanted to help.”

„I don't want any help,” Lapwing said gloomily, but more calmly.

„Everything be damned. There is no way out. I am lost anyhow. If I don't study, I shall die from hunger, if I do, my health will not hold out. There is only one thing—not to listen to talk of the old times, but to look ahead; perhaps something will arrive. The five-year plan. . . .”

Lapwing faltered. The five-year plan was not a subject worth talking about.

„You, Sasha, must not be so intractable when people of experience are talking to you. Leave Communism alone. Use every resource to reach your goal,” said Sereda.

Lapwing stared at him. „To reach my goal? Please tell me where I am to go to reach it?” Then he turned to me and repeated, „Where?”

At this question, all the life of Lapwing appeared before me in a sharply outlined image. The Soviets with all their fine adornments are the only social structures known to him. He knows no other. Yura's stories of German life in 1929-1930 created a confusion of ideas, from which he instinctively tried to disentangle himself in the easiest way, the way of negation. For him the Soviet order of things is the only existing order. Like every other living being, Lapwing desires to adapt himself to existing conditions, because there is no other alternative. It was easy for me to speak about the old regime and criticise the Soviets.

. . . For me, the Soviet society always was, is, and will be, an alien society—a prison maintained by apes. Sooner or later I shall escape from it, no matter what the risk. But for Lapwing, where has he to go?



Or, anyway, what has he to do until the millions of Lapwings and Akulshins become conscious of the value of organisation and unity.

I tried to arrange some scheme of study for Lapwing on expediency and adaptability. Sereda approvingly assented. Besides adjustment, I could offer Lapwing nothing more. Lapwing was gloomily listening, picking the table with the chisel. He did not indicate whether he agreed with me and Sereda or not.

Akulshin shifted from one foot to the other. „Don't be angry with me, my lad. I am sorry.

. . . In such a life as this one is ready to wring one's own neck." Lapwing wearily shrugged his shoulders.

„Well, master," Akulshin said, turning to me, „it is time to go home. Such darkness!" It was time, otherwise we risked being charged with desertion. I arose; we shook hands. Akulshin lingered awhile at the door, then said:

„The main thing, my boy, is to study. Education, that is . . . well, you study."

„I will, even if it kills me," answered Lapwing mournfully. „Well, Yura, will you come tomorrow?"

„Certainly," replied Yura.

We went out.

There in the darkness the voice of Lapwing again resounded in my ears: „Where am I to go, tell me, where?" I have no answer to Lapwing's question. There is none!

## „THE UPPER CRUST”

### The End of the Idyll

According to Camp standards our existence in the Third Camp was idyllic, but unfortunately of short duration. I personally was to blame for this. It was not imperative for me to frighten the commissary with theories of Trotsky ‘deviation’ in order to secure a super-shock-worker dinner. Neither was it necessary for me to consign the Chief of the Column to the devil. The policy was to be quiet as a mouse, and not stir, and remain as inconspicuous as possible.

Late one night the Chief of the Camp was making his rounds through the barracks, obsequiously escorted by the Chief of the Column—that same official whom I had once told to go to hell. The Chief strode majestically past all the bedbug holes and, nearing our retreat, the Chief of the Column whispered something to him, directing his eyes toward Yura and myself. The Chief of the Camp cast a doubting and astonished glance in our direction, and both proceeded on their way. As we might read in the penny-dreadfuls—‘a dark foreboding seared my heart.’ Foreboding or not, it was certain that measures would be taken to move us on without further delay. I could have kicked myself, and resolved that I must take some still undecided, but heroic course.

Early on the following morning, when the brigades marched past the Chief on their way to work, he called me aside and inquired suspiciously why I stayed so long at the Third Camp? I assumed an innocent expression and said that there was little I could do in determining the administration’s policy in the matter. The Chief gave me a doubtful look and said he would investigate.

This did not coincide with my calculations at all. That we would be transferred as soon as the muddle about the requisitions was cleared up was taken for granted, and tampering with official affairs is not among the activities encouraged by the Soviets. I did not report for work that day at all, but made the rounds of the various Camp institutions. There were innumerable openings: we could obtain employment as carpenters in one of the brigades; or as interpreters in the technical library of the administration; as typists; or as regular loaders at the central supply base; or as assistants in the photographic laboratory; and at various other places.

I tried to get work in the colonisation department, which re-settled the „free-exiled“ peasants in the Karelian taiga. My reputation in connection with tourist matters and frontier exploration would be an excellent recommendation for such service, but wherever I inquired I met with the same excuse. The departments were passing through the phase of cutting down the personnel, and at the moment, they said, could not do anything for me. If I would come in a month's time they would have something for me. But a month, or even a week, did not suit me at all. We risked being transferred to some far-away spot, like Segezha, from whence, as we already knew, we could not escape across the swamps.

It looked as if I should have to return to the physical culture sphere, and with my choice narrowed down to that, I went to see comrade Korzun, who was in charge of K.V.O. (Cultural-educational Department).

He was a short man, slightly humpbacked, who greeted me quite politely, said that he could utilise a man of my experience, and then inquired about my 'paragraphs'.

I said that they were nothing exceptional, 58-6, etc. He raised his hands despairingly and assured me that nothing could be done. He was sorry, but with such a sentence my presence in the very centre of cultural and educational activities was out of the question. I thanked him, and as I was leaving he told me to try 'Dynamo', as the regulations there were not so rigid as those in Camp.

I went to 'Dynamo'. A month later this same comrade Korzun needed me, although my 'paragraphs' were still unchanged.

## 'Dynamo'

'Dynamo' is the proletarian athletic association of the G.P.U. operatives and soldiers. It is, strictly speaking, one of its sub-sections, and extremely repellent, even when judged by Soviet standards.

Officially it is the training school for the Cheka operatives: unofficially, it secures all the able and promising sportsmen and athletes of the U.S.S.R., and holds, in consequence, a primary place in all varieties of sport.

The procedure is simple. Ivanov, for example, a promising goalkeeper, is approached by a talent-scout.

„Why don't you join us, Comrade Ivanov? Rations, salary, an apartment, you know. . . .” It is hard to decline the use of a room, but if Ivanov has scruples and does not make up his mind to join, the scout remarks in a threatening manner:

„What? You feel squeamish about appearing with a Cheka stamp upon you? I think I shall have to investigate.”

Dynamo is also entrusted with the task of building stadiums, and, with prison labour, of manufacturing sports equipment. It is furthermore engaged in 'sleuthing' throughout the sporting world, and by its code: 'everything which serves the world revolution is moral,' successfully undermines sporting ethics.

At the 'World Spartaciad' of 1928 I, as an umpire, had disqualified, and barred from the track, one of the Dynamo champions because of his

deliberately incapacitating his opponent by kicking him with a spiked shoe. The injured man was permanently disabled, and the Dynamo champion promised 'to see' about the disqualification.

In the evening I received a summons from the G.P.U., and was told point-blank not to let it happen again. It did not happen again, because I preferred to resign my position as umpire.

There is only one good thing to say about Dynamo: they feed their champions well. This is one of the secrets of their success in the sporting world. Sometimes these champion's appear under the auspices of the professional unions; the army; or even the co-operatives, according to the political requirements of the time. But all are purchased by and subservient to Dynamo.

In the years when I was still capable of establishing records, I had considerable difficulty in declining Dynamo's invitations, the only effective refusal being the discontinuance of training, at least officially.

This strained our friendly relations to the utmost, and if my Camp sentence was not traceable to Dynamo, it was at least not due to any lack of ill-feeling toward me on the part of that estimable organisation.

In consequence of my previous experiences with them, and the paragraphs of my sentence, I decided not to join Dynamo. Things looked very black indeed.

I dropped in among the mechanics, where Mukhin was repairing a felt boot, and Yura and Lapwing were busy over trigonometry. Yura cheerfully announced that his fate was settled: Mukhin was obtaining him a post as electrician. I expressed my doubts, because people with more influence than Mukhin could do nothing, at which Mukhin merely shrugged. „With us, the small fry, this is quite simple. Now, for instance, the fuses have failed at the G.P.U. chief's. I'll call him up and tell him that all the mechanics are on duty, and that I am short-handed. After he has spent a night in the dark, he will sign any requisition.”

This removed a load from my shoulders. Even if I were sent away, Yura could remain behind and arrange for my transfer to Medgora.

I called Yura aside and reported to him the situation on my sector of the united front, which provoked him very much. He thought that if there was one chance in a hundred of obtaining employment with Dynamo, I must take it, and disregard my views concerning them. I knew that, at the worst, Dynamo could only jeer at me, and remind me that when they invited me, I refused their invitation, and now I was compelled to join them.

Later, I realised that I had underestimated the power of Bolshevik realism and certain other facts. But now, as a result of our conference, I hide myself dejectedly to Dynamo.

## Comrade Honeymaker

Outside the Camp, within the boundary of the 'free town', stands the Dynamo stadium and adjoining it the low wooden dwellings—the offices, the warehouses, and employees' quarters.

The first apartment of the office is a billiard room. On the door of the second, is a sign: 'The Board of the Dynamo.' I entered and, visionless while wiping my spectacles, asked if I might see the Chief of the Educational Department. Something bulky and misty rose behind the desk and surveyed me in silence.

I also was silent and felt quite embarrassed.

The shadowy one was plainly surprised and gesticulated in astonishment. '„Well, I'll be damned!

How did you, Comrade Solonevich, get here? Or are you somebody else?"

„Apparently, this is myself, and I came here in much the same manner as the rest of us.” „How long ago? What are you doing?”

„About a month. Cleaning the latrines.”

„That is an outrage! Didn't you know that there is a W.B.C. branch of the Dynamo? To pit it short, from now on you are in the service of the Dynamo, the proletarian sporting association 'Dynamo'. About the details we will talk later. Now, sit down and tell me all about it.”

I had finished polishing my glasses, and beheld a total stranger, but obviously a native of Odessa: his own mother could not have estimated with any degree of certainty the relative proportion of the Turkish, Jewish, Greek, and Russian blood that tinted his bull-like neck. On a thick-set body, stood a roguishly-good-natured head, well thatched with a thick black mat of hair. All that told me nothing, but I sat down and weakly explained that the question of my working for Dynamo was not very easily decided owing to my paragraphs.

„Ah, . . . I spit on your paragraphs. What do I want them for? I don't even want to ask about them. Will you push a dumb-bell with your hands, or your paragraphs? But, first tell me all about it.”

I repeat the familiar performance.

„Enough said, everything is all right. Now, continue to turn the pages of your story,” pronounced the stranger. „We are starting something here to amaze even Moscow. . . . You can spit on the Chief of the Camp. Our chairman, you understand, is Uspensky himself (the Chief of the W.B.C.), his deputy—Radetsky, Chief of the Camp G.P.U. So what is U.R.O. to us? We spit on U.R.O.!”

I looked at the Chief of the Educational Department and began to feel that I was safe with him, and that he might be using me in his own interests. But who was he? I could not very conveniently inquire.

„You will live here with your son. We shall, naturally, find him work, too. When Dynamo starts something, there is nothing half-hearted about it. And here, by the way, is Batushkov. Do you know him?”

A well-set-up man of military bearing came into the room. Theodor Nikolaevich Batushkov, one of the crack physical instructors of Moscow, who disappeared in connection with the „politization”, or the introduction of politics, into physical culture. We exchanged salutations suitable to the occasion.

„All roads lead to Rome,” Batushkov remarked, „but the main thing is, how long?” „Eight years.”

„Paragraphs?”

„58-6, and so forth.”

„How long have you been here?” I informed him.

„You will pardon me, Ivan Lukianovich, but you are a pig. If you derive pleasure from cleaning latrines, that is your affair, but you have a son. Didn't you know that there is not a single sports organisation in Russia where your name is not familiar? There is in the world a class solidarity, and national solidarity, and what not, but there is nothing like sport solidarity. We would have placed you in two shakes of a lamb's tail.”

„You, Theodor Nikolaevich, keep out of it,” anxiously interposed the Chief of the Educational Department, „We have already talked everything over.”

„You talked it over, and I want to talk. . . . We will lead a happy life. First,” Batushkov bent a finger, „we will play tennis; second, we will swim; third, there is vodka; fourth, . . . well, about the fourth it is not so hot. . . .” „Listen, Batushkov,” the chief raised his official voice, „really, you take too many liberties.

There is work to do.” „Ah, spit on it and to hell with it, Jacob Samuelovich, Work! With whom, do you think, you will discuss the work of Ivan Lukianovich? He, in his day, has inspected thousands of sporting



organisations. What do you suppose he does not know? There is no use in trying to be-fool each other about work. Let's just keep up appearances."

"Of course, you understand," fidgeted the chief, "we must show quality in our work." "That goes without saying. Look busy is all we have to do. Don't worry about that. Ivan Lukianovich will 'look' so efficient that we will introduce him right into the Central Committee of the Party. Do you ride horseback?" Batushkov turned to me, "No? I'll teach you, and we will go riding together. Maybe you know, maybe you don't Ivan Lukianovich, how nice it is to see a man who fought for sport in good earnest. Don't know about others, but we, the rank and file, knew that Solonevich worked for sport conscientiously and earnestly. He is not at all like Medovar. Medovar merely speculates in sport. Why he speculates in sport, and not in contraceptives, is more than I can understand."

"Listen, Batushkov," said the other, "you go to the devil, you have the nerve. . . ."

Don't shout, Jacob Samuelovich; I know you and you are all right, but you made a mistake in being born before the Revolution and a Honeymaker, instead of a thousand years ago, and a thief of Bagdad."

"Tfoo,[" spat Honeymaker in exasperation, "how can you talk to him? Now, you see, we have serious things to talk over and this drunken mug. . . ."

"I am perfectly sober. And yesterday, also to my regret, I was absolutely sober." "What do you use here for money?" I inquired.

"What you will be using when you join us. This is a great secret of the Camp graft. In a month's time you will never forgive yourself that you did not get into Camp five years earlier, and that you were foolish enough to run your nerves ragged in Moscow. I assure you that the quietest nook in the whole U.S.S.R. is the Medgora Dynamo. You don't believe me? Wait and see."

## Fickleness of Fate

I left 'Dynamo' in a very confused state of mind. I learned later that, at the Dynamo, although it was in the W.B.C. and in a sense G.P.U., and surrounded by corpse-filled swamps, 19th divisions, and vagrant children's colonies, one could enjoy the leisurely life of a health resort. But this I ascertained subsequently.

After listening to my report, Yura moralised cheerfully: „Well, you see now. And you did not want to go. Didn't I tell you that when times are very bad, a 'Spiegel' is bound to appear.”

„Well, of course, I have had a stroke of luck, and time I had it, too. Although if the administration had intimidated me earlier, I would have gone to the Dynamo sooner; and, after all, there is no reason why they should not invite me to work for them.”

The following day, Medovar and I went to the Third Section to confirm my appointment. This was, as Honeymaker intimated, a mere formality for obtaining their secretary's (Comrade Golman's) signature.

On the way I inquired:

„Which Golman? From the Supreme Council of Physical Culture?”

„Of course. None other.”

The rosy future assumed an ashen tint. Some years ago this Golman was one of the Activists who made their career over the collectivisation of physical culture, and I was one of the few who ventured to oppose him, and the only one who managed to escape unharmed. After one of my disputes with him, he asked somebody present, whether I was the one who was sent to the Solovetsky Islands Prison Camp, and learning that it was Boris, who was sent there, said: „Aha! Then tell this bird he will also be put in a cage somewhere.”

Of course this prediction was imparted to me. Golman, alas, had proved a true prophet. But I did not know whether my presence in Camp would reconcile him to my obtaining employment in the 'Dynamo'.

Had he forgotten the past?

However, he received me well enough, and even with a show of formal politeness. He cross-questioned me for a long time on my case and finally declared that he had nothing against my appointment, but that he depended upon my absolute loyalty:

„You understand that we show you exceptional confidence, and hope that you will return it.”

This was plainly apparent, although Golman's earlier experiences might have made him mistrust my loyalty.

„The order concerning the 'Dynamo' line will be signed by me. Medovar will obtain Radetsky's signature on your transfer and other arrangements. Well, so long. . . .”

I went back to 'Dynamo' and talked to Batushkov about the circumstances of his conviction and exile. Everything seemed clear except the circumstance that he, a former army officer, had received a sentence of ten years, instead of five. The first five years of the term he had already completed, partly on the Solovetsky Islands. His life did not seem to be as pleasant as he pretended; he had left a wife and a child behind. Medovar came back in about two hours, and seemed upset.

„Nothing has come of your transfer. A hundred per cent flop.”

I felt uneasy, and asked the reason.

„Do I know? It seems that there is a case against you in the G.P.U., and it is said that you have stolen some documents in the Podporozhie section. I told Golman he must understand that you have no possible use for such documents, and that you are not that sort of a person. . . . Golman says that

this is none of his business, and that if you engage in such activity. . . . Well, there you are!”

I could see that it was the old Starodubtsev affair,<sup>7</sup> which I thought long ago liquidated. I went to see Golman, who was still polite, but very arid and aloof. I repeated my old argument, that if I had wanted to engage in sabotage, I should have taken almost any documents except those by which some seventy people were to leave the Camp for freedom. Golman shrugged his shoulders.

„We cannot go into psychological research. There is a case against you, and it has to run its course.”

I decided upon risking my last card, with Comrade Yakimenko.

„The chief of U.R.O., Comrade Yakimenko, is thoroughly familiar with the case. By his order, it was closed at Podporozhie.”

„How do you know that?” „He told me so himself.”

„Is that so? We will soon know.” Golman took up the telephone receiver.

„The office of the Chief of U.R.O. Comrade Yakimenko? This is the Chief of the operative group of the G.P.U., Golman. We are working on the case of a certain Solonevich, charged with stealing documents at the Podporozhie U.R.CH.

. . . . Oh, . . . Yes. . . . Yes. . . . All right, we will close the case. Yes, he is here, in my office. Yes, certainly.” Golman passed the receiver to me.

„So you are here,” Yakimenko said in friendly fashion, „and your son? That’s good. Where do you work?”

I replied that I should like to re-enter my old vocation—sport.

„I wish you all success. If you need anything, do not hesitate to call on me.”

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<sup>7</sup> See Russia in Chains

Both the tone and the offer puzzled me. I was so confident that Yakimenko knew everything concerning the B.A.M. lists, and that it was safer to keep out of his sight, but here. . . .

„So everything seems all right, now. I am very glad. I know that you can work, if you really wish to,” remarked Golman warmly. „But, Comrade Solonevich, no arguments. Strict discipline.”

„I am very far from argument just now.”

„That’s the idea. If you had looked at it in that way before, you would not be here. Will you wait in the reception room while I take these papers to Comrade Radetsky for his signature?”

I sat in the reception room of the Headquarters of the W.B.C.’s G.P.U. In and out of the offices scurry the intensely Pinkertonian types, hustling some prisoners about. Next to me, under guard of two operatives, is an old man, probably a priest. He peers, without blinking, beyond the walls of the Third Division (G.P.U.), as if counting the remaining days of his earthly life. Opposite, a nondescript fello face as emaciated as a skull, a woman, bent sobbing into her lap.

They are apparently awaiting the firing squad, since the lesser-sentences would not receive the attention of Headquarters. A nauseous, slimy repugnance wells up, engulfing me and the rest of this twisted world. How and when did it come about, that I, an honest man, sit here, in this room, and am free?

Though a convict, after all. Now, I must climb out of this pit, and run, run, run. . . .

Golman is back with a piece of paper in his „This is your transfer to the First Camp, and the rest of it, signed by Radetsky.” Golman shrugged in a puzzled and dissatisfied way. „Radetsky wants to see you and your son. It seems that he knows you. Come to-morrow at nine o’clock.” I know nothing of Radetsky, except that he is, in a way, a Dzerzhinsky and Yagoda on a

Karelian and W.B.C. scale. What the dickens does he want with me and Yura? I shall be on tenterhooks again till morning.

## Leave-taking from the Chief of the Third Camp

That night the Chief of the Column, looking darkly - menacing and determined to square his account with me for the super-shock dinner and the political Trotsky scare, called me out.

„Solonevich, senior, to the Chief of the Camp.”

The Chief of the Camp looks like a brother of the great Spanish Inquisitor, but on a Village scale.

„Citizen Solonevich,” he begins in icy tones, thinking to freeze my blood, „will you be good enough to explain this f . . fancy business. . . .”

On the desk in front of him, a pile of my notorious requisitions. In my pocket, a transfer signed by Radetsky. He had declared his hand, but I keep mine concealed.

„He was putting me straight on the party line,” tee-heed the Chief of the Column.

Both look contentedly-triumphant: they have caught the ‘intellectual’ in a trap, and now they will show him . . . this and that. I feel my gall rising against this Starodubtsev-like rabble. So, you think you have caught me? But we shall see who will laugh last.

„What fancy business?” I inquired unconcernedly. „You mean this? The requisitions? That does not interest me.” „You stop playing the fool!” suddenly bellowed the Chief of the Camp, „I’ll bend you like a ram’s horn,

you . . .” He described a relationship, which did not make him even an in-law.

„Have you ever seen that?” and I put my fist under his nose, „I’ll treat you, you son of a bitch, so that you won’t recover, before you get to the Rotten River, or further up.” Like shadows in a play, there flitted across the obtuse face of the Chief the apprehension that I might have some influence, that I might have good reason not to feel alarmed, the fury and the humiliation of facing opposition before a subordinate, and many other emotions which I had already noted in Starodubtsev. A feeling of injury and frustration, of disappointment. They had been led to believe that it is enough to have one’s day as master, yet, when the day was most obviously theirs, they could not become supreme.

„I have not the slightest desire to talk to you about it,” I cut him short. „Be good enough to route me out to the First Camp to-morrow.”

I let the Chief see the paper which, over the fat red signature of Radetsky, instructed him to detail citizens Solonevich, sr. and jr., to the order of the Third Division G.P.U., and to provide them . . . and so forth, and so on.

The Chief of the Third Camp is being instructed, but the Chief’s eyes are popping: „Detail to the order of the Third Division!” This means that this man, Solonevich, is a temporarily banished, influential Chekist. He must have spent his time in the Third Camp under some secret and confidential instructions, to spy, to eavesdrop, to sniff out . . .

The Chief wiped his moist forehead with the back of his hand. His voice was quaking. „Well, Comrade, you will excuse me. . . . You understand yourself, it is my duty. . . . We get all sorts of people. I work without sparing myself. Of course, we all make mistakes. But now it will not take a minute. I will order a conveyance for your things. You cannot carry them on your back. I would not think of it. You will please-forgive me.”

If the Chief had possessed a tail, he would have wagged it. But he was tailless. He was only a flunkey, generated in this atmosphere of boundless servility.

„To-morrow morning everything will be ready. You need not worry about anything. . . . And I do not really know how all that happened.”

I accept, of course, his apologies, and turn to go. The Chief of the Column runs to open the door.

In the barrack, Yura asks me why my hands are trembling. I cannot go on like that. Nobody should go on like that.

One can be incinerated in this environment of oppressive hatred, aversion, and helplessness. . . . Lord, when, at last, shall I be able to breathe elsewhere?

## The Audience

A cart was actually sent for us in the morning, and the Chief of the Camp was most solicitous in his friendship. I had slept on yesterday's outburst, and now saw him clearly: a downtrodden, harried creature; a thief, of course, and scum, no doubt, but, after all, just as much a victim of the system of universal slavery, as myself. I regretted my truculence: my swearing, and my shaking my fist under the Chief's nose.

Now he helped to tie up our poor possessions, and once more made his apologies. I reciprocated with mine; we shook hands and parted friends, to meet later in a perfectly cordial manner. After all, every one of us makes shift as best he can in this tragic, mad, merry-go-round. What should I do, if it were not for the present prospect of improving my position? Otherwise, I should have the choice of the Rotten River, or of joining the Activists. In theory, it is easy to decide what to do, but in practice it is very difficult.

In the First Camp, we were billeted in one of the privileged barracks, occupied by administrative employees exclusively, who were mostly from



the railway and water transport. There was not a single URK! The barrack itself was built like a 'hard', unupholstered, third-class railway coach; each set of berths separated by a passage. We found a convenient upper berth, stowed away our belongings, and, now prepared for any emergency, went to see Comrade Radetsky.

He saw us at the appointed hour. The pass was waiting, and Golman came out to identify us, and to usher us into the 'Presence'. Radetsky's study was a large room with maps—how I coveted them—and portraits of the leaders on the walls.

The large, robust man of forty-five was friendly, if slightly sarcastic: „I want to renew our acquaintance, and you don't remember me,” he remarked. I cannot, and curse my defective memory, and try to recall the thousands of faces that have passed before me during my travels.

Radetsky has a full, clean-shaven and very intelligent face, and the quiet, well-bred manner of a 'communist lord', when talking to a non-Party specialist. The Party lords always converse with studied refinement. But, still I fail to remember him.

„This is your son? Also a sportsman? Let us become acquainted, young man. Why do you start your career so badly? Right from a Concentration Camp. Too bad, really too bad.” „Must be my fate—'Kismet',” smiled Yura.

„Don't be downhearted, youngster. „Everything will turn out well,” ”he quoted, „Do you know where that is from?” „Yes, I know.”

„Well, where is it from?” „That is Tolstoy's . . .”

„Good, young man, good. Sit down, sit down.”

I could have expected almost any reception, but not this. What is it? What kind of ruse? Or, is it just one of those comedies of which G.P.U. is so fond? Why this paternal banter in a room where death sentences are signed probably by the dozen. I was lost!

„So you do not remember me,” Radetsky turned to me, „I shall have to help you. In 1928, I think, you were building a recreation park at Rostov, and concerning it you fought all intruders, whether it was to your advantage, or not. These included me.”

„I remember you now. You were secretary of the North Caucasus Region Executive Committee.”

„That’s right,” Radetsky nodded with satisfaction, and went on as if reading an official paper, „and, therefore, a Chairman *ex officio* of the Council of Physical Culture. That park, I must do you justice, was excellent in planning, which shows that you were not fighting for nothing. . . . By the way, that park we commandeered for ourselves: Dynamo, in any case, is a better master than the Union of Soviet Salespeople.”

Radetsky looked at me searchingly and ironically, to remind me that, at the time, I little suspected that I was building a park for the Chekists. Nor did I. The parks at Kharkov and at Rostov were planned by me and, in a way, the crowning glory of my sport’s career. I had toiled hard and risked much. Now it seems that I both worked and incurred animosity for the Chekists. It hurts me, but I must not admit it.

„It is not the question of the master,” I answered bravely, „I believe you admit all the toilers to the parks.”

Radetsky raised his eyebrows at ‘all the toilers’.

„I would not say that. We admit some, but not others. But, anyway, your idea was technically correct. Have a cigarette? And you, young man? You don’t smoke? And no vodka? Very good, excellent, you are an exemplary sportsman! Still, you, *quam bonus pater familias*, must keep an eye on your son and heir, or they will teach him to drink at the ‘Dynamo’. They are great specialists there in that department.”

I expressed my doubts as to that.

„You are bound to believe me, because it is our business to know all that; everything which we want to know now, and want to know to-morrow. For instance your biography—we know that in detail.”

„That is natural. I wrote and appeared publicly under my own name for ten years. . . .” „That was the proper thing to do. You proved to us that you put your cards on the table, and from our point of view, lies have short memories and a boy’s political wild oats are not to be held against him. . . .”

I nodded assent. I did not play an open game, and there are many blemishes in my biography which the G.P.U. does not even suspect; and for his political wild oats, many a lad has faced his Maker, but let that pass. It was not for me to provide Radetsky with every detail of my autobiography. G.P.U. is weaving the legend of omniscience with malice aforethought, the more to impress the community, but I accept it with a grain of salt, and that there is a deficiency of information in the G.P.U. concerning me, I am quite positive. But why argue?

„Now, let us go over to the business part of our conference. You understand that we do not invite you into Dynamo for the beauty of your optics. We know you as an all-union first-class worker in physical culture, and a brilliant organiser. We have nobody of your calibre at Medgora. Honeymaker is not a specialist, Batushkov is only an instructor. There is no sense, therefore, in allowing you to continue cleaning latrines and splitting wood. We shall use you in your own line. I don’t want to know why they sent you here, I shall ascertain presently, and much more completely than you can tell me. At the present moment it does not interest me. We put a problem before you: to create a model Dynamo. In the autumn, let us say, we shall play for the championship of the north-western region, the Dynamo championship.

Could you get together a team good enough to lick our Leningrad section? How about it, can you show class?”

The cat was out of the bag. Every factory committee and every Dynamo section looks forward to a victory in the field of sport. It is a question of ambition, of fashion, and of gratifying the gambling instinct.

The factories impoverish each other by offering athletes advantages in accommodation, work conditions, etc., and Dynamo purchases the champions. For the factory committee, production is the humdrum, the unavoidable prose of life, while the football team is a matter of pride, an object of solicitous care, a colourful spot against life's grey back-ground.

Very much in the same fashion, the country gentleman of the last century esteemed, sentimentally and monetarily, a fine hound more than a moujik who toiled for him, and an excellent kennel-master more than the harvest. Now Radetsky wants me to play the role of that kennel-master. He wants to outshine Leningrad, and to accomplish this triumph, he will close his eyes to any paragraph in my sentence.

„Comrade Radetsky, I must warn you in all honesty that I cannot do the impossible.”

„But what is the impossible?”

„How can Medgora with only fifteen thousand inhabitants to choose from, compete with Leningrad?”

„Is that what is worrying you? Medgora is not the whole area. We do not intend to limit you to the scale of Medgora. You will officiate within the entire W.B.C. You will make the round of every Camp, select your men, and make up your teams. . . . You will have sufficient to choose from. Some three hundred thousand prisoners. That is enough, is it not?”

Three hundred thousand! I tried to estimate the population of the W.B.C. when I was in the Podporozhie U.R.C.H., but I had arrived at a much smaller figure. Three hundred thousand men!

Oh, Lord!

But the necessity of the moment has the right of way. I must collect a good team, and I can probably make it up with the help of the prisoners and instructors.

„You will begin with Medgora. Go over all the Camps and organise teams. If you should have any misunderstanding with Medovar, or Golman, come directly to me.”

„Comrade Golman has already instructed me to ‘agree’ with him without demur.” „I am the boss here, not Golman. Yes, I know that your relations with Golman at Moscow were not the most cordial, and that is why he. . . . I understand that there is no reason why you should exasperate him any further. . . .

But if you have any difficulty with him, come to me . . . by the back stairs, so to say. We can talk the matter over; Golman and Honeymaker will have their orders and you will be entirely out of it. And in regard to your everyday needs, we shall take care of you. It is in our interest that you work at your best.

We shall let you choose something suitable for your son, and in the meantime he will be an instructor.”

„I wanted to go to the Technicum,” declares Yura.

„To the Technicum? Good, more power to you. Although, with your paragraphs you are not allowed to go there, but I hope that you may,” Radetsky smiles good-humoredly, if ironically, „re-construct yourself?”

„I have already half ‘re-constructed’ myself, citizen-Chief,” plays up Yura.

„There is not so much left to change then. We can consider our conference closed and the resolutions carried unanimously. By the way,” he turned to me, „you are a good tennis player, if I am not mistaken?”

„Oh, no, just middling at it.”

„What do you mean by middling? Batushkov told me that you were conducting a campaign for the rehabilitation of tennis, and proving that it is purely proletarian sport. Anyway, we shall meet on the courts some day. Is that agreed? Well, so long, and I wish you all success.”

We went out.

„We must have another conference, because I do not understand one least little thing about it,” said Yura.

We turned into the yard where so recently we were piling wood, and sat on our handiwork. I lectured him on sport in its political aspects, and on the Dynamo’s ambition. He was not familiar with my physical culture exercise, because I disliked mentioning it. Too much brain, nerve, and money went into it without satisfactory results.

Out of thirty-two swimming pools, nothing remained. They were in the hands of any organisation that fancied them, and sport’s self-government, even in the commissariat, was regarded as counter-revolution; the recreation parks came into the possession of the G.P.U., while Radetsky’s and their like play tennis, the game I had so sedulously idealised. Why provide sport for the masses, when they, above all things, need food?

I had wasted six years of toil and anxiety in vain, so sport was not a very exhilarating topic for me.

But, to facilitate our escape, the new adventure was all I could imagine. The very next day I was given a pass which set me at liberty to move within Medgora, i.e. within about fifty miles, north and south, and some ten miles, west. That was a marvellous freedom. It gave me, in fact, a greater scope for movement than the free population of the Camp enjoyed. The scheme for escape began to assume a concrete form.

## The Great Grafter

The Dynamo was almost empty. Only Batushkov, extremely bored, played a game of billiards against himself.

I brushed aside the game he suggested and, instead, requested a detailed account of Honeymaker.

„Honeymaker? By his basic profession, he is an Odessa-ite”. This graphic description was too indefinite, and I pressed for more.

„An Odessa-ite,” expatiated Batushkov, „is a man who can live on air pie. He knows nothing, undertakes everything, and, would you believe it, succeeds now and then. In Moscow he speculated in something or other, then he wormed his way into the Dynamo, and travelled as a representative of the Moscow teams, so as to obtain the travelling expenses and the dinners. Then he somehow got into the Party. . . . But he lives and lets live. A rogue, but a very decent fellow, if you know what I mean,” he wound up unexpectedly.

„How does he know me?”

„Listen, Ivan Lukianovich, every sporting dog knows you. Three times better than you deserve. Weren’t there three Soloneviches, and who can make out whether you are the first, second, or third? By the way, where is your other brother?”

My other brother fell in the White Army of General Wrangel, but that was not to be mentioned, so I said something more agreeable, Batushkov glanced at me comprehensively.

„MmL [?]. . . yes, there are not many old sportsmen left. I thought I should be safe. I was not in the White Army, kept out of politics, and thought that nothing could touch me, and yet here I am. And with Honeymaker you will get along very well. Here he is, by the way.”

Honeymaker burst in and, without any preamble, bombarded me with questions.

„How did you get along with Radetsky? What does he want? How does he know you? Listen, Theodor Nikolaevich, what do you sit there for, like a crow on a tree-branch? There is work to do. We have not sent in our progress report for March, so what do you think I will send them?”

„I shan't have to think. I know it without thinking.” Honeymaker threw his brief-case on the billiard table and exploded.

„Now you see for yourself. He does not even want to pretend that there is work. He mailed our report for February to Leningrad, and did not even keep a copy. And do you think that he remembers what he told them? So, what shall we report for March? We must show expansion, progress, but what shall we progress from, I ask you?”

„Don't boil over, Jacob Samuelovich, it is all nonsense.” „What do you mean, nonsense?”

„Of course, it is; in February we had the winter season, and now it is spring. We cannot possibly have ski-ing teams growing in March. For the spring we must think of something else.” Batushkov tried to put a cigarette butt into the billiard pocket, thought better of it, and slipped it into Honeymaker's brief-case.

The conversation assumed a familiar form. I prepared to depart.

„Just a minute, Ivan Lukianovich, where do you think you are going? I want to talk to you about Radetsky. There is so much work that my head goes round.' Let's go into my study.”

„Such co-workers I have, as you can see for yourself,” began Honeymaker, returning to his main theme, „I shall have to lean heavily on you, as a reliable support. You can imagine what we'd look like, if anybody from the centre should come to inspect us? That would be our bally funeral. And



Batushkov's, too. It is not enough, to play tennis with Radetsky, and drink with the rest of the nobs. If only there is an inspection from the centre . . . .

„I can see, Honeymaker, that you are a novice in this business, and worry needlessly. I, myself, am from the centre and inspected similar projects more than two hundred times, and I can assure you that it does not mean anything. Just a bother, *haloimes*, as you would say.”

Honeymaker looked at me like a hen, sideways. This Jewish term meant in the Odessa jargon ‘khaltura’, but in the third degree, so to say.

„And, did you live in Odessa?” he cautiously inquired. „Guilty. For six years.” We were obviously reaching a common understanding.

„Do you know, Ivan Lukianovich, let us talk straight, like business-men, only it must be strictly between ourselves, and no monkey tricks.”

„All right, no monkeying.”

„You understand without any explanation that I am occupying a responsible post for the first time, and that I want to show my ability. It is a matter of my career. Well, what did Radetsky have to say?”

I repeated our conversation.

„This is remarkable! That Yakimenko supported you against G.P.U. is good, but if Radetsky knows you, you don't need him, although without Yakimenko, Golman was not keen on taking you. Do you know what? Let's form a team. I have a project, you know, but it is strictly between ourselves. There is a cultural-educational department here in the administration board, something like the Professional-Union ‘cultprosvet’.<sup>8</sup> Now, each ‘cultprosvet’ has an instructor. Is it not an indispensable part of the cultural work, and is it not disgraceful that our K.V.O. has no instructor? It is simply inability to recognise the political and educational value of physical culture. Is it not so?”

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<sup>8</sup> Cultural-educational Department

„Of course, it is just failure.” I agreed.

„You do understand that we need an assistant; and not an ordinary helper, but a prominent one, like yourself. But, I ask you, if you will go to K.V.O. . . .”

„I have been, and they did not take me.”

„They did not,” Honeymaker commented cheerfully, „that’s what I told you. And even if they did, what would they offer you? Thirty roubles salary. Would that satisfy you? Of course not. You know, Ivan Lukianovich, we understand each other, so why should I try to pull the wool over your eyes? I know very well that in comparison to me, you are the world’s leading specialist. But you are a prisoner, while I am a member of the Party. Now, suppose that I should get an appointment as instructor of physical culture in the K.V.O., they would offer me five hundred roubles a month. Well, probably they would not give five hundred, the bastards, they would say that I am holding two posts, but they would give three hundred.

Three hundred, surely. Now, it is this way, you could write out all the necessary orders, methods, instructions, and what not, and I would run round obtaining official confirmations. And the salary, you understand, we would split fifty-fifty. How is that? You understand, of course, that I do not want to ‘do’ you. You, as a prisoner, would not receive a penny for the same work, but I should not get my hundred and fifty for nothing. I should have to do a deal of running about.”

Honeymaker looked at me as if he thought that I suspected him of exploitation. But I looked upon him as a benefactor of humanity. A hundred and fifty roubles a month would secure for Yura and myself a kilo of bread and a litre of milk a day. It might mean that we could escape in fit condition, and not like others who linger for five days, and then perish. „Do you know, Jacob Samuelovich, that in my position I would have to accept even fifteen roubles, if you offered them to me? And because you offer me a hundred and fifty, with your consent, I will make a counter-proposal.”

„What counter-offer?” Honeymaker seemed uneasy.

Try to get a contract from the GULAG for a book. Call it something like this: 'A Handbook of Physical Culture for the Labour-Correctional Camps.' I will write it and we will split the fee. All right?"

„Splendid,” Honeymaker was jubilant, „I can see that you did not live in Odessa for nothing. That is all very fine, indeed, my word on it. We will make a name for ourselves. Of course, I will do it. What do you want a name for, at GULAG? YOU have fame enough without it. Prepare the outline and the work project, and I will see Korzun at the K.V.O. No, not Korzun, He is indifferent towards physical culture, being a hunchback. I shall see Uspensky. That fellow has a good head on his shoulders. That’s the idea, Uspensky. And why did I not think of him at first? Say, you must be penniless?"

I had been penniless so long that I had ceased to mention my financial straits to anyone. „To-morrow I will get you an advance. We will pay you sixty a month. We can’t do any better, believe me, we can’t. We have to pay the Camp a hundred and eighty roubles. And we will manage something for your son, too. To-morrow I will arrange matters for you at the E.T.W.<sup>9</sup> dining-room."

## A Carefree Life

Spring in 1934, sudden and hot, found Yura and me in a curious dilemma. Honeymaker had succeeded in his plan for securing the instructorship in the K.V.O., and he faithfully kept his part of the bargain between us. In addition to a hundred and fifty roubles from him, Dynamo paid me sixty roubles, and the Technicum remunerated me for lessons on physical culture and

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<sup>9</sup> The Engineers' and Technical Workers' dining-room is the best dining place in Camp, where they nourish the best shock-brigadiers from among the engineers and the technicians.

literature, at the Camp-rate of fifty kopeks a lesson. The fifty kopeks were equivalent to the purchasing price of two ounces of granulated sugar. We had our meals at the E.T.W. dining-room, to which we were introduced by Honeymaker under Radetsky's sponsorship. Honeymaker also gave me an introduction to the head of the W.B.C. Supplies Department, Comrade Neumayer.

The introductory note, written in very illiterate Russian, among other things, stated that 'the instructor of physical culture cannot labour when hungry'. Why a lumberjack or a navvy can toil when hungry, I did not stop to inquire. The paper concluded: 'By order of Radetsky.'

Neumayer received us very angrily.

„We have just taken a hundred and forty-two people from the E.T.W. rolls. Do you think we shall remove the hundred and forty-third for your sweet sake?”

„And the hundred and forty-fourth,” I corrected him sententiously. „The paper mentions two men.”

Neumayer then noted the similar names and then realised that this was not an ordinary case of shock-workers, but rather one of favour.

„All right, I will call up Radetsky,” he said somewhat more amiably.

To become inscribed on the rolls of the E.T.W. diningroom, was more difficult than admission to the Communist Party, outside the Camp. But we were enrolled. The disagreeable part of it was that our meal tickets had to be taken from some engineers, but we strove to find consolation in the fact that the arrangement was temporary, and that the engineers were fixtures in Camp for the remainder of their sentences. However, there was an unpleasant incident connected with Yura's meal ticket. This proved to be one belonging to his chief, engineer Stashevsky, the director of the Technicum. We decided to return it unofficially to him personally, otherwise it would have been diverted to someone else's use, and Yura really did not

need it, as I was constantly visiting other Camps where they usually fed me without a meal-card, so that Yura could use my card most of the time.

At the E.T.W. dining-room, the lunch consisted usually of a plate of lentils, and the dinner of a more or less eatable cabbage soup with traces of meat, some porridge or fish, and a cornstarch pudding. For supper, the same porridge, or lentils. Nothing to brag about, but enough to save one from starvation.

[...] here were still two disconcerting matters: We decided not to occupy the room offered us by the Dynamo as we had no desire, through our projected escape, to implicate any one there, especially several very good people, to whom I have no intention to refer in my chronicles. We remained in the barrack, from which an escape could only make matters unpleasant for the local 'Activists', but their fate was to us a consideration of little consequence. But ultimately it so happened that the only one who helped us materially was Comrade Uspensky, the Chief of the Camp, and he, naturally, would not suffer. He would probably mutter a few words to himself concerning our escape, and there the incident would end.

Moreover, we had to dispense with the bedding, mattress, and pillow stuffed with sea-moss, which would have been ours in Dynamo. We slept on bare boards throughout our stay in Camp. Yura pressed me more than once for some bedding, and after all, it was not difficult to get. It was only much later that I understood my neglect: I was disinclined to spend energy on anything, not closely connected with the preparations for our flight. The bedding had no bearing on this, and in the woods we would have to sleep on harder substances than bare boards.

After publication of the first volume of this work, I received many letters from readers, some among them hinting that the description of our Camp life was far-fetched. I agree that it may seem so, but I will say, seriously, that I have not described a single character, nor a single experience which is not real. The characters, except where specifically stated, bear their real names. For obvious reasons many interesting adventures, such as our encounter with the Svirlag Intelligentsia, could not be narrated for fear of

implicating these people. The episode, and not the name, would betray them to the G.P.U., and the material for this book had to be planned so as not to endanger a friend. I do not think that there is anything blameworthy in that. I feel constrained to make this statement, because so many of the actual occurrences appear incredible (or, in other words, are difficult to reconcile with hardened prejudices and prepossessions). The whole summer of 1934 seems fantastic even to me.

We were certainly well fed. I was doing very little work. Yura did not do anything, because the Technicum turned out to be as much of a 'khaltura' project as Dynamo.

We played tennis, sometimes with Radetsky, swam, or took sun baths on the lake shore; we read books by the armful. We led the life of a health resort of which a Moscow mechanic, for example, could scarcely dream. Were I to remain in Camp, the circumstances of which I shall speak later would resolve themselves into a well-fed, comfortable, safe, and even free existence, impossible for even a prominent Moscow engineer. All that summer I recalled the favourite maxim of Markovich: If there must be a G.P.U., let it be right at my side, where I can see it.

I had the G.P.U., in the person of Radetsky, where I could see it. But for the preparations for our escape I should have slept easier in Camp than at home near Moscow. But this blissful state did not alter the fact that, fifteen kilometres north, whole camps were perishing from scurvy, that, sixty kilometres north, the colonisation section was re-settling 'kulak' families—the population of a whole village from Voronezh—who lost more than six hundred of their little children en route, and that, twenty kilometres farther north, embedded in the swamps, there was a colony of four thousand waifs, doomed to die.

This comparative paradise, and our state of well-being, the equal of which I still have to reach in exile abroad, did not weaken for a second or in any degree our determination to escape. Nor did the decree of July 7, 1934, proclaiming capital punishment for any attempt at escape from the Socialist paradise.

One may be not too good a Christian, but the choicest viands a W.B.C. Camp can offer, stick in one's throat when one recalls incidents such as the little girl with the frozen pot.\*

## Walking the Sleepers

My expert advice to Comrade Honeymaker took very little time. I had never intended to compose the handbook, although I received an advance of a hundred roubles, now my only outstanding debt to the Soviet Government, which, however, owes me for several things. Some day we may settle our account!

My principal problem was to produce a team good enough to 'lick Leningrad's', as Radetsky put it.

That might be possible. There ought to be eleven men for a team, out of three hundred thousand prisoners, ought there not? I formed three very weak teams from the Medgora administrative personnel and, for a better choice, had to scout among the Camps adjoining Medgora. For that purpose, the Division Chief gave me a pass to the Fifth Camp, some sixteen kilometres south by rail and ten kilometres west, into the taiga on foot.

The pass was stamped: 'Proceed under guard'.

„With such a pass,” I said, „I shall not proceed anywhere.” „It's your affair!” snarled the Chief. „It is you who will be thrown into the SHIZO, not I.”

I went to Honeymaker and explained that a stamp like that reflected unfavourably upon the standing of Dynamo, and he, very much on his dignity, said:

„Did I not tell you there were a lot of idiots here? I will call up Radetsky.”

That night a new set of papers, made out without the offensive stamp, was delivered to me at the barracks, in acknowledgment of my recently acquired prominence, I infer.

With that I was given R. 4.74 for railway fare, but I set out on foot, of course, for the sake of economy, training, and reconnoitering. For the same purpose I carried a heavy knapsack. I wanted to ascertain whether the sight of it would excite the curiosity of the guards surrounding the Camp and the pickets along the road, and how far they would go in searching it. However the sentries about the entrance to the Medgora section of the „Socialist paradise” betrayed no interest in it, and did not even ask for my documents. I do not know why.

The railway wound its way along the bank of Lake Onega. On the right, i.e. the west side, the right-of-way is closely embraced by the granite boulders of a ridge, torn, ragged, and dented by glaciers and dynamite. The left path drops down into an impenetrable tangle of bracken, trees, dead trunks, and brush. Beyond lies the gem-like pale blue tranquillity of the lake, scalloped with cornelian shores and dotted with emerald islets. From an artistic point of view, this landscape, illumined in early spring sunlight, was superb. But practically it was depressing and intimidating. How could one traverse a hundred and twenty miles of such jungle and rocky country to the frontier? I had covered about five miles before I was certain that no one had followed me, and that it was safe to turn westward to reconnoitre that blasted territory. Boulders, piled up in chaotic masses on this glacial deposit, were covered with slippery films of damp moss, and miraculously sprouting fir, pine, juniper, and intermittent beech and birch. The undergrowth was so dense that one had to break through it, often encountering unexpected water-holes, brown and stagnant.

Two miles further the stones ended, and I came upon a swamp some two hundred metres wide, which I had to skirt from the south. Further distant, the wooded and granite encrusted ridge reared westwards.

This I ascended.



I stood on the edge of a fifty-metre descent. Progress along the ridge was impeded by a barricade of storm-felled trees. It was a foretaste of what detained us later, in our flight, and cost us so much time and effort. I detoured, and landed at the bottom of the precipice on the edge of a rusty swamp, covered with rushes. I cast a stone into it, and it immediately sank.

That was the country we had to cross in order to escape, and may the Lord have mercy on us! But, there was another side of the medal: once in that country, no one could discover us. It would be on equal, if not even, ground, that we should face our pursuers.

I retraced my steps to the railway, and walked some two miles; I felt dead tired, and could barely lift my feet. The excitement of the first walk at liberty had subsided, and the months of solitary confinement, of the U.R.CH., of Camp food, and of nerve strain, began to take their toll. I climbed a boulder, took off my pack, windbreaker, and shirt, and presented my light-starved skin to the sun's rays.

No Camp, no G.P.U. . . . Even the smoke from my cigarette hung in this balmy air. . . . In the grass scurried the insects and the beetles, as busy as Honey maker. A tiny bird hopped from tree to tree and chattered to itself. It had obviously nothing on its mind, and moved about and twittered in the fullness of its heart, because of sun, of spring, of the joys of its wild bird life. Then came a squirrel bent on the serious business of chasing its bushy tail round a tree trunk. The tail was running away, like lightning, and the squirrel flashed like a dull gold sunspot on the dull moss-covered pine bark. In this game, it seemed, it could spend a stupendous reserve of energy. Not like me; walk twelve miles, and quit. Listen, squirrel, if I had your energy, I would not remain a day in the U.S.S.R.

I raised myself on my elbow, and the creature saw me. Its mobile face peeped out from behind a tree and, naturally, resented my presence there. It spoke its mind and disappeared. I felt both mournful and gay: Heavens! Here's a creature alive, with no G.P.U. over it!

## The Hired Men

I heard voices, and from around the bend on the railway line, came three peasants, one about fifty, and two others about twenty to twenty-five years old. They must have been dressed shabbily originally, and their poor attire had had to stand the wear and tear of years. One was wearing torn boots, the two others wore birch-bark plaited sandals. All their gear consisted of diminutive bundles, probably containing bread, which were swinging from the end of a stick. They did not look like fugitives from Camp, and coming abreast, they passed the time of day, stopped, and asked for matches. I got out the matches, and the old man scrambled over the ditch to my boulder. He looked embarrassed.

„How about some ‘makhorka’, boss? I really asked about matches just to see what sort of man you were.”

I got out the tobacco and he rolled a cigarette for himself, careful not to waste a single grain. The lads looked sheepish and yearning. I could see their mouths water and tossed the pouch to them. They each rolled a cigarette just as carefully as the old man, and we all sat down to a friendly chat.

„Haven’t had a smoke for wellnigh five days,” said the old man, „and, God knows, I miss it.”

„Where are you from? Prisoners?”

„No, we are hired men from the timber camp. But we could not stay there, it is impossible. We are glad we got away alive.”

„We thought we would earn some money,” sarcastically remarked one of the lads. „And here’s what we earned.” He held up a foot in a tattered sandal. „All the earnings.”

The old man cringed guiltily. „How were we to know?”

„That’s it. If you don’t know anything, don’t try to talk others into it.”

„Why reproach me?” pleaded the old man. „Didn’t the government men, the officials, explain clearly that we will get a rouble and fifty kopeks for loading one cubic metre of timber? But when we came here, it was not loading at all. We had to haul the timber half a mile across the swamp to the loading place. And all the food we had was a pound and a half of bread a day, and no buckwheat even. How could we haul timber on our backs on such rations, I ask you?”

„So they signed you up?” „They signed us up all right.”

„We thought we would earn enough for some clothes,” teased the same lad. „Here are clothes for you.” The poor scarecrow paraded grotesquely. The old man pretended not to notice.

„Through the kolkhoz committee it was, that they signed us up. There was an order, and allotment, to send forty men from our village. Some went to the peat pits, others came here. They made us sign a contract, and here look at it. We shall be glad if we get home alive.”

„And what shall we find when we get there?” asked the second lad.

„We can manage at home,” remarked the old man uncertainly. „When one is at home, one can make shift.” „You will be missed at home, never fear,” said the sarcastic one. „What do you think, they are baking a cake to greet you; to welcome you home with your bank-roll?”

„Then, again, we have no „workdays’ now,” sadly commented the other lad. „People with workdays have little to eat, but without them one might as well lie down and die.” The workdays, or trudodni, are an allotment of working days, or hours a week in a kolkhoz, for which the holder is allowed to account for in food.

„Where do you come from?” I asked.

„We are from around Smolensk, and who are you? One of the local authorities?”

„No, not one of the local authorities. I am a prisoner.” „Lord forbid,” said he perfunctorily. „They say that at the Camps it is better now than when at liberty, that they give bread there and kasha.” (I remembered the 19<sup>th</sup> Division and did not want to talk about the Camp.) „And at freedom,” continued the moujik. „Here is freedom for you: they sent us into the taiga, where there is nothing to eat, nothing to wear, no place to live, where the mosquitoes eat one alive. But they won’t let you go home, they won’t return your passport. We begged them, for the Lord’s sake, to give us back our documents; cannot you see that we will all die here; we had not strength even before we came here, and the timber, even the lightest, is about 200 pounds. We had to lug it over the swamp where there are no roads. At last they took pity on us and returned our passports and documents. That is how we got away, and now we beg for bread or for anything we can get. We rode about 50 miles by rail even. All we want is to get to Peter.”

He used the old affectionate name for St. Petersburg.

„What will you find at Peter?” the sarcastic one broke in again. „You think they will feed you at Peter? Like hell they will.”

„At Peter they will,” said I, for I knew that even when hungry the townfolk would deny themselves the last piece of bread to help the starving moujik. A year ago, before the introduction of new passports, the capitals were flooded with begging Ukrainians, and even they, coming from the granary of Russia, were helped.

„Cannot be helped. We will beg in the name of Christ,” said the old man piously. „Yah, you thought to get some clothes,” giped the young one again, „but now, what we had is worn out, and we will come home naked. Well, let’s go.”

The freemen of the U.S.S.R. rose to go. The elder looked at me, begging: perhaps there is some bread I can spare?

I thought that I could reach the next Camp without food and get something there. Under their hungry eyes I unpacked the bread, and a small piece of

bacon, about a quarter of a pound, no more. At the sight of this they ceased breathing and swallowed hard. „Bacon, for the love of God,” said one.

I handed it to them, and it was split into three portions with careful precision.

„Now, we can have a snack,” rejoiced the old man. „No matter what the U.S.S.R. has come to, there are still good people in it.”

These „freemen” departed. The squirrel threw his beady eye on me from behind the trunk, and his glance seemed to say: „You are creating culture, you believe in God, you develop science. What fools you!”

That was difficult to deny. I donned my clothes, hoisted my pack, and continued my journey. Some two miles along the road I met the moujiks once more, but now they were being searched by a patrol of armed guards. One was examining their bundles and themselves, another looked over their identifications, while a third stood about ten paces away, rifle in readiness. Apparently I would have to suffer a similar search. My papers were in order, but the countless examinations one has to endure as a citizen of the 'freest country in the world' inspired in place of indifference a peculiar kind of degradation, a servile shiver, an inward cringing, even when they are not accompanied by fear of trouble. An immediate Soviet-conditioned reflex followed: assert yourself!

I came abreast the group, stopped, and hands in my pockets, surveyed them with a penetrating eye.

„Caught them, all right?”

The guard looked up from the documents in a surly manner.

„Who the devil can tell, maybe they are trying to escape. And who are you? From the Camp?”

The situation began to clear. The guard did not say: „Are you a prisoner?” „From the Camp,” I answered in my best 'administrative' tone.

„The devil take these documents,” muttered the puzzled guard. „I wonder what they mean.”

„Let me see them.”

Even a man with more experience than the guard would have been unable to decipher anything from the bundle he handed to me. They contained everything with which a Soviet citizen becomes encumbered, on the general principle: the more the merrier. It is difficult to tell what paper will appear authentic to the possessor of authority armed with a revolver. Take my case, in which a commutation ticket proved more important than a passport, a Professional Union book, a permanent identification card from the newspaper Labour, its assignment certificate, and a handful of other documents of minor character. In terms the same general custom, the man carried with him the birth certificate of his daughter Eudoxia, but Eudoxia was not of much assistance, while his leave of absence had been provided by the Professional Union, which had no authority to issue it at all. This was the duty of the village committee, and was performed more often than not, for a consideration, a litre of vodka, or something similar. The man probably obtained his leave in this way, and was now quaking in his shoes. „No,” said I, with the correct touch of disappointment, „the papers are all right. What timber camp are you from?” „Masselga.”

„Who was your supervisor? Who is the chairman of the workers committee?” The questioning was conducted in a manner to make the guard suppose that I belonged to the administrative personnel.

„Have you searched them?” „Of course we have.”

„Have you taken their boots off?” I persisted.

„No, we forgot about the boots. Hey, you, take your boots off, what’s the matter with you.”

The boots yielded nothing, of course, but my papers were forgotten.

„Well, let them toddle along,” I said. „They will straighten it out at Zvanka.”

„Roll along, you.” The senior guard let them go, and the patrol, forgetting my documents and examination, turned north. When we were well out of sight I gave one of the men some sound advice on not offering vodka to all and sundry, on dropping behind his travelling companions and detouring out of sight of a patrol should he light on one. I could not tell them much of the road from Svir to Zvanka, but I knew that this line was guarded very strictly. The man gave me a hopeless hangdog glance and tried to explain.

„They did not want to let me go, so I offered a half-litre to the committee, truly enough, but how was I to know?” I could only sigh. This moujik and the lads were not at all like Akulshin. They will be lost; they are lost already. They cannot find their way to Petrozavodsk, much less Svir. The old man was so upset that, to all my instruction and advice, he muttered agreement and understanding, without understanding it. The lad in boots was bemoaning his fate and reviling the rogues in the Workers’ Committee, who purloined his half-litre of vodka. The sarcastic lad was trudging forward in silent rage.

Their futility depressed me, and I said good-bye.

## The Fifth Camp

The most privileged of all productive Camps of the W.B.C. was the Fifth. It was occupied in obtaining the stems and beams for the shipyards at Pinuga, Soroka, and Kem, where W.B.C. was constructing barges, sloops, and other wooden river craft. Out of a hundred trees felled in the forest an occasional thirty might have a root at right-angles to the trunk, forming a knee suitable for the stem, or beam: but at other times there would be three only. A shortage of stems would leave some six or seven thousand prisoners idle in the shipyards through no fault of their own. In view of the importance to others of uninterrupted production, the camp was granted a certain latitude

in its internal administration. It had a quota of stems to deliver each month, and a certain quantity of provisions was allowed for it. Otherwise no one interfered with them, and the chief, Comrade Basilchook, did all his ingenuity and foresight permitted him. These abilities proved successful in furnishing a food supply sufficient to nourish his prisoners properly. The quality of the food was no worse than that of a workman in a Moscow factory, and the calorific content was even higher. The necessity for this was appreciated, because no weakling could handle the heavy timber (with a knee at the end of it, which fashioned the stem). I was sure I should find here men for my teams who would enable me to lick Leningrad.

Comrade Basilchook was of a type uncommon in the Soviet administration. A Petrograd workman and an old Communist, he had been sentenced to three years' detention as a participant in some group deviation from the Party line, a sentence he had already served for six years. This only makes sense when you realise that the original three years had been automatically prolonged. An extension of this character he once received in my presence. This stated simply and prosaically that, referring to the decision of the PP. G.P.U. under date so-and-so, reference number so-and-so, the sentence of prisoner Basilchook, A.A., is extended one year, for which his signature must be obtained.

This was his fourth yearly 'reprieve', as he called it.

„It is simple to get in here,” he said, signing it phlegmatically, „but I shall have to wait before getting out.”

Former Communists, sent to the Camp not for stealing, murder, or rape, but for disobeying Stalin's dicta, are obviously there for life. And Basilchook refused to recant.

„I'll remain here till Doomsday,” he said. „Let the scum recant, but we would rather sit here. By God, if I had to return to grain requisitioning, I would rather stay here. But I must pay proper attention to physical culture, otherwise I might rot to hell in this place, and might never witness the world revolution.



And it would be fine to see the world revolution. There will be the hell to pay, what?"

These old boys, celebrating their own revolution in a Concentration Camp, still chatter of the world upheaval as if it were a country carnival.

I visited the Fifth Camp four times, but my amicable, although not very intimate relations with Basilhook, were established from the very beginning. He and his bookkeeper were bored to death, and the vista opening over the football field was just as roseate for them as for the factories, the V.U.Z.—the Higher Schools—and many other places.

## A Few Words on Physical Culture

There are in Soviet Russia a number of good things which the authorities claim as their creation: the supposed strengthening of family ties, the alleged healthy sexual life of the young, the girl-parachutists, the thirst for knowledge, and various other improvements, including physical culture.

The Russian emigre Press is ill-advised in taking the term „physcultura” satirically. It is not an empty sound. It embraces everything within the scope of individual effort and that which promotes one’s health.

Gymnastics, for instance, play the part of a Platonic duplicate of medicine.

There now exists an immense interest in physical culture quite unknown to the old Russia. But this interest, just as the pretended rebirth of the family, the alleged healthy sex life, the parachutists, etc., were not the outcome of official initiation or encouragement, but the reaction to other so-called governmental measures.

Workmen, deteriorated with hard labour; students, smitten with tuberculosis; employees, dizzy from constant reconstruction and changes of location, all these, starving, worn-out and showing signs of what is officially known as „Soviet wear and tear”, welcome with national alacrity anything that promises to sustain their failing strength.

The craving of the people for physical culture, brought about by the conditions of life under the Soviets and not by governmental effort, is only satisfied to the extent of from 10-12 per cent according to my estimate. I have always opposed the construction of a mammoth physical culture, combined with a colosseum type of stadium, seating 360,000 people. These structures cost sixty million roubles over and above the 'free' convict labour.

If, instead of physical culture, one would take, let us say, „the thirst for knowledge”, a slogan-like expression worn to tenuity with unfulfilled promises, one will see that these two have a common inception and develop on parallel lines. This thirst was born of a dissatisfaction with the existing Soviet conditions of life, it affects tens of millions of people, and remains ungratified: there are no schools, no text-books, no curricula, no teachers. Even the schools which exist in reality (there are many schools which exist only on paper), occupy the time of the young out of all proportion to the services they render. The results of this instruction may be observed in citations from Pravda, the official Communist Party organ, reprinted in the Russian emigre Press. The school buildings are overcrowded to an extent which would appear incredible outside Russia. And these are operating in three shifts, even in Moscow. The ventilation is so inadequate that the pupils become faint from lack of air in the course of their instruction.

But it is a showy office building or a stadium, the Intourist hotels, the houses of Soviets and of Unions, and not the schools that are built. Even in Moscow no more than four or five school buildings were erected during my seven years' stay there. In suburbs such as Saltykovka, two schools had to suffice for a community of ten thousand. The Government has failed to maintain even the old school buildings.

It would be naive to attribute every evil to the stupidity of the Soviet regime, because, in final analysis, it was not established for the benefit of Russia, but for the world revolution. To the requirements of the home country, the regime is indifferent. I cannot conceive how from any other point of view one can logically account for the failure of the schools, collectivisation, the tragedy of the Camps, or the ski-ing fiasco.

The Fifth Camp, in consequence of the special requirements it had to meet, was somewhat isolated from the other stations and possessed a sufficient food supply. When, a month later, I returned, not to recruit a football team, but to organise physical culture, 1,500 prisoners had built a recreation ground, and graded three courts for volley ball.

Considering the locality and Karelian conditions, this was an onerous undertaking. They had to remove stones that weighed sometimes as much as ten tons and to cart sand to fill the holes. Yet the work was done rapidly and willingly during one off day.

In initiating light athletics, I was surprised to discover that six out of a group of men who tried to put the shot could propel it eleven metres, of course without training or style. One middle-aged peasant propelled it 11.8 metres, and broad-jumped, in boots and camp clothing, 5.7 metres.

This is what we call the rich black loam strength, untapped during the old regime. With the necessary training it might well attain world records.

## A Secret

I was walking back to Medgora from the Fifth Camp on a charming spring morning, on a morning when one did not desire to remember Revolution or meditate escape. Along both sides of the road babbling streams continued happy concert with the feathered first arrivals from the South, each sound

corresponding to the beautiful colour of the spring flowers, the starved North's dash of beauty. My thoughts were set in *obbligato* to what I saw and heard.

„Hello, Comrade Solonevich, don't you know me?”

It was difficult to recognise anybody with nothing but a voice floating from under the shrubs, out of the deep shadows of the forest. And just as hard, when an armed guard veiled in a mosquito net crept out into the open. „Don't you really know me?” „Don't keep your light under a bushel, let me have a look.”

The Topka<sup>10</sup> took off his mask and I recognised one of the Urks from the Third Camp. „How did you become a guard? Re-constructed yourself?” „Yah, I re-constructed all right,” said he. „Here's a life like a Mardi Gras! Here I lie basking in the sun with nothing to do but listen to the birds. . . .”

„What do you do? Are you on picket duty?”

„Yes. We catch the runaway prisoners. If we can. Have you some 'makhorka', eh? We could sit and light up, how would that be? Hey, Stiopka, come on over. He is all right.” Stiopka, unknown to me, crept out of the bushes, and without a word started to roll a cigarette. We lit up.

„Do you catch many runaways?” I began socially.

„I would not say many, but some,” the Urk guard was modest, „but this is not the main thing. Stiopka and I will hang around here till the end of summer, and then—aida [?]', to Turkestan and the warmer clime.”

„So they are letting you go?”

„Nothing of the kind. We'll do it on our own. That's why we sit here, just to learn where there are 'secrets' posted. In this country one can walk only on, or along, the road. A few hundred feet right or left of it, and—good-bye.

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<sup>10</sup> Armed pickets in ambush

Lost in the swamp. So, where there is no swamp, a 'secret' is posted, just as we are, in a hole, covered up with shrubs, invisible but seeing."

That did not give me a particularly easy feeling, and the Urk unfortunately could not give me any information. Besides, the 'secrets' concerning the Fifth Camp did not interest me very much.

But my imagination began to paint unpleasant pictures: Yura and I are walking along the road, and suddenly hear a voice from under a bush, 'Halt, who goes there?' and that is the end. . . . The spring colours faded and the world again assumed its Soviet reality, relentless, and unescapable.

## The Shock-Workers' Convention

I arrived at Medgora in the early evening, while it was still light. Yura was not in the barrack, and I felt depressed. There was nothing going on in the way of recreation, except the All-Camp Convention of the Best Shock-Brigaders, which had been expected for some time, and opened to-night in the large building of the W.B.C. Club. I decided to attend.

Of course the hall was packed and, of course, there were reports. The Chief of the Production Department, Comrade Verjbitsky, spoke on the well-worn theme of 'How we grow'. He spoke of the development of the W.B.C. sovkhoses, the labour of the timber camps and quarries, the erection of the Tuloma power-plant, the Soroka port, and of the strategic highways to the frontier. He told us what is projected, according to plan, in a year's time, and in three years, towards the end of the second Five-year Plan, and in the beginning of the Third.

The second Five-year Plan would eliminate all caste and class distinction, and, it appeared, would abolish the Camps in consequence. But, out of the report emerges a startling, and yet not altogether surprising conclusion,

that the number of prisoners, necessary as man-power for all the planned enterprises, must steadily increase „to keep pace” with other *tempo* of socialistic construction.

If at present there are close on three hundred thousand pairs of labouring hands in the W.B.C., how many will there be with the further grow the envisaged by the orator?

Comrade Korzun, Chief of the Cultural and Educational Department, followed with a talk on „How We Re-educate and Re-construct Ourselves”. The Soviet penal system, according to him, is built not upon the theory of punishment, but rather on the principle of occupational correction. „We do not punish,” he explained to his prisoner-listeners, „but with our attentive, comradely approach, we inculcate love for the free, creative, socialistic work.”

Korzun follows the general outline of what Gorky wrote in his time upon the opening of the White Sea-Baltic Canal, but with one material difference: Gorky was lying to the ignorant „free” citizenry of Russia and to sympathisers abroad, while Korzun dilates on the merits of the system, to the very victims of it, who know only too well how the Soviets ‘re-educate, but do not punish’. Everyone in the audience knows of the 19th Division,<sup>11</sup> the Dikov Ravine, f[?] and shooting without trial. Many know what I have so far been spared, the punitive Camps, like the Rotten River, the „forced regime” gangs with their half a pound of bread a day, and the recognised right of any Chief of Column to take the life of a prisoner, the dread-inspiring Morsplav works near Kem, where the prisoners toil waist-deep in water day after day in the swift, never-freezing mountain streams.

The audience knows it all. And yet—they even applaud. Yes, in the history of the Soviets many world records have been broken, but the mightiest of them all is that of brazenness. To lie, and to develop such indifference and blindness to mendacity as in Soviet Russia is unknown anywhere else in the world.

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<sup>11</sup> A punitive section

After that the stage is lined with a score or so of poorly dressed men. These are the shock-workers, the distinguished, the cream. The musicians are very active for a moment and the hall applauds. Comrade Korzun is pinning the order of the W.B.C. or the Order of the Belomorstroy on their chests.

A ravine where corpses and dead animals were thrown, with all due pomp and circumstance. This order is a Camp counterpart of the Order of Lenin.

With a handshake to each, Korzun introduces them to the 'public'.

„Ivanov, a former thief . . . created a model brigade . . . exceeded the quota of work umpteen per cent . . . induced so many of his comrades to re-construct. Next.”

The *crème de la crème* proudly bows to its 'public', which applauds lustily while the rear of the hall makes fun of them. Each is given the floor for a few words on his 're-con-struction'.

A young lad of strong gypsy appearance speaks in a pungent Odessa argot of stealing, murder, cocaine, counterfeit money, and the rest of his social shortcomings before he saw the light in the great socialist upbuilding of the country. Now he understands, he says, and so forth, much like an old-fashioned religious camp meeting.

Well, this son of a gun, he is doing splendidly. He is so artistically persuasive, so sincere, that even I, an old timer, begin to doubt my own scepticism. Possibly, after all, he did see the light and re-construct?

There are protestations of loyalty to the 'land of all toilers', to be ever true to the great Stalin, etc., and the gathering closes with the signing of socialistically-competitive contracts (a socialistic way of 'speeding up', when one sends one's seconds to another workman challenging him to a labour contest in defence of his socialistic honour on the field of toil).

By force of habit I am taking down the high lights of the meeting in my note-book, but even with that diversion I have reached my two-hour limit of endurance of a Soviet gathering, and I am ready to leave.

The 'Popka'<sup>12</sup> at the door had very decided views about my leaving the hall before the meeting was over and ordered me back. I waved my note-book in his face and said that I had to radio the report of the meeting to Moscow. He let me through. Fired with my long walk to the Fifth Camp, and bored to death with the ballyhoo of the meeting, I thought of the nearest equivalent to a man's club, the Dynamo. Just the place to get a drink and relax for a while!

I could hear Yura's voice in Batushkov's room, and went in. The room could not appear more hospitable. The table was littered with vodka bottles, full and empty, and a very representative assortment of 'zakuska' from the G.P.U. 'free' dining-room. This lavish display was explained by the maudlin presence of Comrade Podmokly, chief of the operative section of the Medgora G.P.U. Batushkov, somewhat less maudlin, was on the bed, accompanying Yura on a guitar. The song was „Jonny, wenn du Geburtstag hast?“, in German, but he cut it short in favour of the English, „Oh, What a Rotten Song!“, which he proudly executed at the top of his voice, and with much fancy work on the guitar. With the last flourish he got up and, putting his arms around me, became completely Russian. „Ah, Yanusha, you son of a bitch, you are a damned nice fellow and I like you. Let's have a drink.“

„Yes,“ said the Chekist, „we certainly must have another drink.“ So we had a drink, then another, etc., etc.

The white night shed its opalescent light over this picture later, in the wee small hours: the G.P.U. chief's unsteady progress between two prisoners, Solonevich, Yura, perfectly sober, and Solonevich, Ivan, not precisely so. The passing patrols of the G.P.U. operatives greeted this spectacle with friendly and benignant smiles.

Such exhibitions occurred in the Dynamo with unremitting regularity, which confirmed Batushkov's prediction of the pastime which was in store for me by joining Dynamo. But its explanation is very simple.

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<sup>12</sup> G.P.U. guard in a green cap



Communist or not, nearly everyone wants to share a drink. Solitary drinking is much too dreary, and drinking with Communists is too risky. Even if, to borrow from the Latin, a Communist is not always a wolf to a Communist, he is always a competitor. In one's cups one is liable to express sentiments opposed to the 'general Party line' and remain unconscious of it until the next 'purging', when the Inquisition will pose the smugly malicious question: Do you recall, comrade, how you told comrade . . . ?

Of course, everyone present must drink. Only Yura escapes on the plea that he cannot drink and sing at the same time, and the popularity of his repertoire of Russian, German, and even a few English hits, all new and ever impressive to a commissar, who might have dispatched to their fathers as many men as a huntsman had killed hares, but would still wax sentimental and drop a tear into an undrained vodka glass.

All in all, it was not a pretty spectacle. But while I am not prepared to say that the drink, the food, and even the company attracted me solely for practical reasons, these were decidedly important. Yura, during a month of this intensive conviviality, learned everything we needed to know about the bloodhounds, the 'secrets', their routes, and the ultra-loyal Karelian peasants who collected one bag of flour for every fugitive captured and delivered. I must, however, qualify this with the statement that the Cheka description of the effectiveness of the cordons was grossly exaggerated.

Our plans for procuring firearms were also closely connected with those drinking-parties at the Dynamo. These plans, however, fell through, and once on the way 'home' to the barrack Yura said to me:

„Do you know, Dad, when we finally enter the forest on the way to the frontier, we must perform some sort of ceremonial ablution ... to wash all this away.”

Such an ablution he improvised later. But in the meantime we stopped dropping in on the Dynamo under the convenient pretext of the approaching Camp Spartaciad and the rigorousness of our training.

Besides, the date of our flight was approaching and my nerves began to show signs of wear to such an extent that I was afraid I could not answer for my self-control. The drunken bouts of the Cheka operatives, of the power of their all-suppressing organisation, their cynicism divested of the last vestige of an ideal serving the cause and reduced to the stark psychology of a gang of paid, professional murderers aroused feelings of such obscuring red that it clouded the brain.

We had thought, planned, and worked for our escape for seven long years, and had no desire to be shot as a social equivalent for the broken bones of some wretched degenerate. That would be too preposterous, so we 'dropped' the Dynamo aristocracy.

## The Re-construction So Called

The building of the Cultural-Educational Department housed in two large rooms the editorial offices of the camp sheet, called hopefully *The Re-construction*. It came out three times a week and consisted of two pages about half the width of the Russian emigre publications in Paris.

The editorial staff consisted of sixteen semi-literate loafers, with one Smirnov as chief, although the whole work could have been easily performed by one man. At the appearance of a stranger, the loafers put on the sacrosanct airs customary at the 'free' Soviet editorial offices, and sought to stare the visitor out of countenance.

Only tried and true distinguished prisoners were ever admitted to the editorial staff, or the privileges appertaining thereto, and the extensive opportunities for blackmail. A stranger was *persona non grata*, and his reception was not calculated to create any illusions in his mind.

Back in Podporoxhie, Markovich, the printer, editor and circulation manager of the local *Re-construction*, tried to find a post for me or Boris on his sheet by talking it over with the visiting instructor, a Comrade Smirnov, from the Medgora head office.

This Smirnov was dressed and shaven in the approved movie director and journalistic manner: leather leggings, skin-tight breeches, a motley apache cap, shaven moustache and chin, but under the chin a billy goat, or Uncle Sam beard—which was thought to be an American editorial appendage. Round black-rimmed glasses and a pipe served as finishing touches to the ‘imposing’ figure of the instructor. His reception of Markovich’s suggestion was decidedly frigid.

„He might’ve wrote anywhere you say, but we pay that no never mind. With articles like that we won’t letten him into our editing office.”

I could not allow such illiterate drivel to pass, and asked Smirnov where he had picked up his Russian. Decent language is not entirely superfluous to a journalist. The leggings, the goggles, and the apache cap intimated a cold contempt.

„Didn’t learn it from you. . . .”

But later he had to learn a thing or two from me.

At Medgora I did not call on *Re-construction* immediately, because of the complete hopelessness of obtaining employment there, nor during the Dynamo period, as then I did not need it.

But Radetsky had commissioned an article dealing with the physical culture of the camp and I, knowing that he was entirely unacquainted with the printing business, wrote an article of just the length to fill a complete copy of *Re-construction*. The contribution was well written, if I may venture to say so, and that was essential to induce Radetsky to accept it as it stood without abridgement. His thick red-ink communication instructed the editor to publish it entire in the next issue.

I prompted him to write the word 'entire' so that the boys on the editorial staff should not compress it out of all recognition.

With that article, Radetsky's instructions, and a spice of venom for past disfavour, I went to see Smirnov, who by that time had risen from the post of instructor to an editorship. His goggles were, if possible, even more tortoise-shell, and his beard even more photogenic.

His pipe never experienced cleansing.

„That's you, ah? Seems to me I have seen you somewhere. You are a prisoner, are you not?"

That I was a prisoner, went without saying; that Smirnov remembered me very well, was equally obvious.

„Yes, yes," nodded Smirnov, transacting solo his idea of a business interview with an important Ipersonage, „but, speaking concretely, what is your pleasure?"

I pulled up a chair and made myself comfortable while pulling all sorts of papers out of my brief case and watching him out of the corner of my eye. His pipe was hanging lower, and the 'American' beard began to bristle.

„Well, what is it you want, young man?"

I was at least ten years his senior, but I let that pass and continued to arrange my papers, with only one brief warning glance in his direction. My proceedings obviously embarrassed him, for his pipe moved in partial surrender to the middle of his mouth. I was getting on his nerves.

„Did you bring a manuscript?"

I took out the article and silently handed it to him. He studied first the resolution, and then ran through the pages, realising at once that there was enough copy for a complete edition of the paper. His face expressed professional indignation.

„We cannot pack the whole number with one article!” „None of my business. You see what Radetsky says in his instructions, to publish it without compression.”

He took the pipe out of his mouth, placed it on the table, and thumbed through the pages again: „Just sufficient for one complete number.”

„You think, perhaps, that Radetsky does not know the size of Reconstruction? To be brief, you have the article and you have read the resolution. Will you be good enough to give me a receipt for them?”

„We do not give receipts for manuscripts submitted to the editor.”

„This is not submitted. This is sent to you for publication as it stands. Just give me a receipt, so that if anything happens to the article, it will be Radetsky who will persuade you, not me. The receipt, please, or it will be the G.P.U. who will extract it from you.” His beard and goggles lost some of their theatricality, he wrote out the receipt in silence, and handed it to me.

„Will you be good enough to state that you received the article and the resolution.” He looked daggers, but amended the receipt as requested.

The next number appeared with nothing but my article in it, a novel sight even for *Reconstruction*. It brought in its wake a cancellation of a six months’ ‘good behaviour’ credit earned by tale-bearing and blackmail, but no one had sufficient courage to complain to Radetsky about it. I felt a certain satisfaction, even if it was little. After that I avoided the office for several weeks.

But on the day following the Conference of shock-workers, I went to hand in an article on physical culture which was marked by Radetsky for publication. On this occasion Smirnov did not assume the manners of an American, but treated me reproachfully, and even respectfully. He reminded one of Koltsov’s reference to the ‘mercenary pens of the bourgeois scribblers’ (Koltsov would have us believe that he laboured on the *Pravda* for the love of writing), and yet caused us to think that nowhere in the

world, and I say that advisedly, did the Press fall so low and the pressmen become so degenerate.

I am a journalist by heredity, temperament, and training, and I succeeded in preserving a certain respect for my profession even after my Soviet assignments. But what do the Smirnovs and their like contribute to the craft?

„Dashed off a little notice, did you?”

Considering the magnitude of my former contribution and the six months' paradox, the diminutive 'copy' was not unlike a trick in a dog fight, when the loser turns on its back and waves its paws in feigned friendliness. Smirnov did not wave but he looked through the peering-glass of his goggles—there was nothing the matter with his sight and the glasses were only worn for the sake of appearance—pleading for a truce. If I could have read his thoughts, they were: „Now, you have had enough of Podporozhie, don't put me on the spot again.” I felt disgusted with myself. He personally was not to blame.

I should not have given him away like that, and I should not have blamed him for what he did. Had the Revolution never occurred he would have been a telegraph operator somewhere in the provinces, would have worn resplendent neckties, and seduced the local maidens with his guitar and his crooning, would always plan and dream to secure a 'certificate of maturity'—Russian for passing the Regent's examination—and never get it. . . . But here in camp, after years of spying and blackmailing, he, the fool, takes seriously his position as chief editor of the central office of Reconstruction, a publication which nobody needs nor desires, a paper which exists only to gratify the Bolshevik habit of lying and denunciation. The falsehoods had but a limited circulation inside the camp, but the denunciations were preserved by a network of the 'stoolpigeons' of the G.P.U. And, of course, it added to the general confusion.

Smirnov was relieved to see that the notice I brought was brief, when one of the editorial hangers-on came up to ask what to report about the Conference.

„We shall have to kill the story. Just take it out of the galley proof,” he said.  
„What happened?” I asked.

He looked at me with suspicion, but I put him at his ease and assured him that I did not intend any trickery.

„You have worked on the Moscow Press, I think,” asked he. „Yes. Once upon a time.”

„I cannot tear myself in two, really. Here is what happened. Directly after the Conference, those bastards, the prize shock-workers, broke in and burgled the Torgsin shop.”

„I see. Completed the re-construction?”

„Absolutely. Some were dead drunk and those were caught, but some of the others got hold of foreign currency in the shop and cleared out. They are still at large. Now here is what stumps me: the report, with all their confessions, their photographs and the rest, is set and ready for the press. Shall I publish them, or shall I hold them back? I have no one to tell me. Korzun went to see Radetsky before all this happened, and there is no one to give me instructions.”

I looked at the editor-in-chief with feigned amazement. „Listen, were you working for the Press ‘outside?’” „Well, yes, in the provinces,” he admitted evasively.

„Pardon me, but as a ‘vydvijenets’, the new blood?”

„What the hell business is it of yours ?” He lost his temper at the unpopular word.

„I do not see the Marxian approach. It is perfectly evident that you must publish all the photos and confessions and the article. Have you not wired

Moscow, Pravda, and the T.A.S.S. ? Think, all the world is aware that these people have re-constructed themselves, while only a comparatively small number know of their falling from grace. For the whole world these bastards must remain saints, the prodigal sons who returned to the roof of their father, the U.S.S.R. If you do not publish these portraits, you will upset the entire political campaign.”

The editor-in-chief was highly impressed.

„You have not worked for Pravda, have you?” he asked in awe. „Yes, for Pravda,” I assured him blithely.

„Wouldn’t you like to work for us?” he inquired, „we shall pay you a fee.”

But this offer did not interest me, and as we parted he invited me to drop in at any time.

## The First Terrorists

Thinking over my extraordinary position in Camp, I have found it paradoxical. The question of its permanency was purely hypothetical, since, in theory at least, there is nothing enduring under the hammer and sickle of the Soviets. But there remained the two months preceding our escape, and I was confident that I should manage somehow. I tried to forecast and neutralize all the doubtful contingencies, but there were some I could not foresee.

My fall from the Dynamo heights began with the business of the football team recruiting, but how was I to know that? I had toured a few neighbouring Camps, and assembled two fairly good teams, twenty-eight men strong, including the reserves. Since it was evident that they could not toil twelve hours a day and go into training in addition, they were



transferred to greener pastures, namely, the Armed Guards. Comrade Golman asked me to compile a list of the players, indicating their social status, terms, and paragraphs, so that he might issue the necessary orders.

I prepared it and, for the first time, saw with perfect clarity that I dare not show it anywhere, and that all my football activity hung on a thread. Out of the twenty-eight gentlemen, three had been convicted for banditry, two on some vaguely defined counter-revolutionary charges, and the rest of my new flock showed the 58-8 which stood for the „terror”. Five or six terrorists might look casual among the rest, but the twenty-three gave my innocent football teams the look of a terrorist organisation inside the camp.

Even if Golman did not suspect me of selecting the men with my eyes open, he could not order, nor could Radetsky for that matter, their transfer to the Armed Guards. What was I to do? I wanted Honeymaker's advice, but could not find him, and went back to the barrack, where I found Yura sunning himself over a chess-board with a new friend he had picked up somewhere at the Second Camp. This was a young man remarkable in many respects, and even showing signs of genius. He was one of the two score students of the Moscow Art High School who had the same 58-8 and ten years in their sentences that my new charges showed. I shall have to be silent on other interesting aspects of his biography, and refer to him merely as Klebnikov.

Yura looked up, while the other pondered a move, and inquired what had upset me. I reported, and Klebnikov commented that for a list like mine they would not pat me on the head, which I knew only too well. Yura suggested recruiting among the less objectionable element, but Klebnikov said that that would be hopeless, and supported his opinion with very simple and sound reasoning. Almost all good sportsmen are students; they are not sent to Concentration Camps for stealing, and they cannot be sent for agitation, because, he said, everybody would be in the Camps then, and the higher schools would have to close their doors. The only possible charge, then, is that of terrorism.

„You cannot maintain that all Soviet students are doing is nothing but throwing bombs,” I commented.

„No, I will not maintain that, but then not all of them are in the Camps. Just consider it. It seems that throughout the world it is youth that engages in the terror. The most educated part of youth are the students, and only the most energetic of the students are sportsmen. These are they who become terrorists. It is a form of natural selection, and nothing can be done about it. That's why they stay here, that is, those who came out whole.”

I was disconcerted by the list, and the gloomy perspective it opened for me, and by the high academic tone of Klebnikov's revelations.

„Oh, the boys simply play the fool, and then have to spend ten years kicking their heels in a Concentration Camp.”

„You seem quite positive that all the boys do is play the fool, and nothing more?” He turned to me.

I had no decided views on the matter, although I knew in a general way that the terror broke out chiefly in the country, and that occasionally there was assassination in the cities, mostly of the lesser administrative lights, and that the newspapers were naturally reticent concerning it.

„Did you throw bombs?”

„I did not. I was small fry, that is why I am here, and not in the hereafter. The time that fifty-two men faced the firing squad, you know.”

I had heard something of a vague character about that affair in Moscow, and now looked at him with interest.

„So that was not a penny thriller, eh?”

„No, that was an organised matter. Our school worked on the sets of the first Moscow Art Theatre. There was a plan to throw a bomb into Stalin's box. But we could not manage to be in time.”

„Did you have the bomb?” „Of course we had.”

„And fifty-two people were ready to throw it.”

„Now, listen, Ivan Lukianovich, you ought to know better than anyone that not only those who throw bombs get shot, but anyone whom G.P.U. can frame up. . . . They got hold of a laboratory where the bomb was made . . . not at our school, at the chemists' . . . But taking it as it is, I can assure you that they may play the fool, but they will end by fooling someone who does not want to be fooled. You can take it from me, Stalin will never die a natural death.” Klebnikov’s voice was free of any hatred. He spoke like a surgeon meditating a dangerous but indispensable operation.

„Why didn’t they shoot you?” asked Yura.

„For various reasons, but mainly because my pater is quite a Party man.” „So that is your father who heads the . . .” I mentioned a prominent Moscow institution.

„The very man. Almost everyone who saved his hide in that affair had a partisan father. When the case broke, the fathers naturally began to run here and there, and say probably what you said just now, that we were just youngsters playing the fool, or words to that effect. There were quite a few fathers, too. That is how we escaped execution.”

„So you are, in a manner of speaking, a full-fledged proletarian student?”

„Absolutely. And even a komsomolez. I know what you want to ask. How did it happen that I, a proletarian and so forth, became interested in such an unlisted sporting event as throwing bombs? Is that it?”

„Exactly.”

„Just for that very reason. Stalin hoodwinked me, not you. You never believed him, but I did. Stalin exploited my enthusiasm, not yours. Also, you do not happen to believe in what Selvinsky called ‘The sacred banality of the world’s happiness’.”

„So far, I don’t.”

„There you are. And I do. It makes no difference to you that Stalin is discrediting that ‘sacred banality’ forever and a day. But it makes a lot of

difference to me. If Stalin will run the show for another ten years, i.e. if we don't liquidate him, things will come to such a pass that you will hang him."

„And who are—we?"

„The old regime, so to say. The landlords and the manufacturers" „I am neither a landlord, not a manufacturer."

„That is not important. I mean the people of the old world, those who don't care a damn for that 'sacred banality'. Don't you see that if Stalin stays much longer, then all is finished, done for. The situation will be such that anyone might come and rule. A Mussolini, or a Hitler, or even an Amanullah would do."

„Don't you think that such a situation has already arisen?" „There you are, and so much the worse. But I don't think so. Such a condition has not arrived yet. Do you follow me? If it should prove to be you who will hang Stalin and so forth, then everyone will have a right to ask me, the proletarian: what have you done with the Revolution? Have you taken the power into your horny hands? Did you bring Russia up to snuff? Now—get out! Shut up and no back-talk! You have had your chance. And there will be nothing to say. But we do not want the country which we are building to be ruled by a Hottentot princeling. Is that clear?" „No, that sounds slightly involved."

„Why so?"

„Having disposed of Stalin, what do you propose to do? And why will it be you who will do it, and not someone else?"

„There is no one else. There are only the toiling masses, and they will become master." „But who will direct those masters?"

„Nobody will have to direct them. There will be no direction. There will only be a technical supervision."

„A technocratic Utopia, so to say." I tried to be satirical.

„Quite, technocratic, if you wish, but not a Utopia. It is technically inevitable. We have no landed gentry. Take any plant or factory and throw out the Party cell. What is left? The workman and the engineer. The Party cell's only aim in life is to bother everyone till he becomes silly. Men with concrete problems to solve, the workmen and the engineers, will always find a common understanding. There is no other way: we must rid ourselves of the Party chiefs, lock, stock, and barrel. And we shall get rid of them, mark my words,” he concluded with calm conviction.

„We, Nicholas the Second, by the grace of God . . . ” I began.

„You can laugh as much as you like,” he interrupted. „He laughs best who laughs last. And we shall be the last to laugh. We shall throw them out, but we will not let the landlords in. If you want to work as directors of the sovkhozes and are qualified and capable, you will be welcome, and we shall pay you cash on the barrelhead, and give you complete authority to go ahead. If Riabushinsky . . . ”

„How do you know Riabushinsky?”

„I know him. It was he who predicted that the bony hand of famine at our throat will make us come to him, and beg him back to lord it over us. Well, if Riabushinsky wishes, he may work as a director of a trust. If he should work well, we will pay him his hundreds of thousands in gold.”

„Where will you get all these hundreds of thousands?”

„There will be enough. If everyone will work and no one interferes, there will be millions. You will get the physical culture work, Ivan Lukianovich, and a free hand to go ahead.”

„You draw very heavily upon the ‘we’. Who are really the people you refer to as ‘we’?”

„We are those who work, and those who train. A sporting organization elects you, let us say, not for four years, as in the bourgeois countries, but

for twenty, so that there will be no leapfrog, and you will be responsible only to a court, or a tribunal.”

Klebnikov spoke without the customary enthusiasm, ecstasy, or religious zeal that stamp the visionary. He hammered his words in, like a carpenter his nails, truly and dispassionately. He did not even gesticulate, and his strong wide, sturdy shoulders displayed strength.

This scheme of technocracy was no novelty to me. It is very popular among a certain section of the Soviet intelligentsia, where it is discussed in the abstract, in the would-it-not-be-fine vein, whereas Klebnikov had no if's whatever.

„You see now, why we must hasten to liquidate Stalin before he overturns everything completely. And he will be liquidated.”

I scanned Klebnikov while he discoursed. At twenty-two life seems so simple to arrange. Simple seems the mechanism of the „terror”. But I think that the spy system of the G.P.U. is simpler and more ingenious still, and that is why it is anything but simple to assassinate Stalin. When I spoke of that, Klebnikov calmly conceded that the ‘terrorist’ technique is imperfect, but that its improvement is in good hands.

„And what are you going to do about the fathers?” I desired to know.

„It is pretty much the same with the fathers. Mine is comparatively harmless, but if he tries to stand in my way, I shall be constrained to remove him, too. It is, naturally, not very pleasant, but it cannot be helped. . . .”

Yura gazed at him with reproachful blankness. Neither the technique, nor the psychology of slaying one's own father, found favour with him.

## Fathers and Sons

This was my first encounter with a Camp representative of the Soviet youth. They were usually billeted much farther north in the W.B.C., and only the highly qualified were sent to Medgora, as well as the indispensables who were working at the planning bureaux, the laboratories, the research stations, and other similarly engaged units. When, a month later, I began the recruiting for the All-camp Spartaciad, for which the paragraphs of the Camp sentence were waived, I had an opportunity of ascertaining the number of prisoners who had formerly been students.

I was given every facility for this, because upon the sum-total of participants depended the size of the appropriation for sporting goods and equipment. This computation was not quite exact, because the Kem and the Segezha Camps to which the majority of students were assigned, did not forward their figures. The remaining seven brought the total to me to just over six thousand men. It is safe to estimate the grand total in the vicinity at about ten thousand.

There is another interesting, if unexpected estimate, at which I had arrived while working at the Podporozhie U.R.Ch. The 3 per cent to 4 per cent of the Camp intelligentsia are almost entirely composed of Soviet students. Indeed, in order to understand present-day Russia, one ought to study the Camps. It is here that one may find the missing links of many a chain of events taking place in the 'free' Russia of the Soviets.

This also applies to the problem of fathers and sons. Among the emigres this difficulty has been solved comparatively without pain. The literary archives yielded a century-old 'bitter smirk of a disappointed son over a spendthrift father', but on the whole the relationship resolved itself into verbal notes, so to say. The fathers among the emigres are bankrupt, there is no disputing that, but no one in the history of the world could be more insolvent than the fathers in the Soviets.

I would now like to present my observational viewpoint. Personally, I occupy a place midway between fathers and sons; I have outgrown the sons, and somehow did not grow old enough to reach the fathers. Yura and I play in the same team, he as a half-back and I as a full-back. What sort of a dividing line do we show between the fathers and the sons? And no matter what value one is to ascribe to the political significance of Klebnikov's determination to 'liquidate' his own father, if necessary, this decision exercised a very depressing influence on both Yura and myself.

When he departed, Yura absentmindedly removed the pieces of the unfinished game of chess from the board, and commented:

„You know, Dad, we must clear out. I am not in love with massacres, and there will be one here, as certain as day. Do you remember Senka B.?”

I remembered Senka B. and several circumstances associated with him, all connected with the problem of fathers and sons.

At Moscow I had an excellent acquaintance, one Semion Semionovich B., a Communist, a workman, and an unquenchable enthusiast for the Revolution. I had some dealings with him in the development of the 'cultural style of life', and of the 'life beautiful', which were all the rage when the larder was empty, just as the fox-trot and other crazes are now. He had a son, Senia, a youth of twenty or twenty-two, who worked as a technician in the same plant, and was by way of being an inventor. Yura got in touch with him when building an ice-boat, and one day we called upon them.

Senia was at the window reading a newspaper, and his father was ready to leave. „Where are you going?” I asked.

„To the partcom.” (Party Committee).

„Our father is going to the partcom.,” intoned Senia, „to offer his luscious proletarian body to all and sundry. They are not gathering under the street light any more.” „You'd better keep quiet.” Bitterly and ineffectively the father picked up the familiar topic.



„Keep still? Let those who died of hunger keep still,” taunted the lad, and turned to me. „Our fathers are like prostitutes now. For a Party manual they will go to bed with anyone. They would sell their families and their souls and bodies.”

„Shut up, you louse, or I’ll . . .” banged the father’s fist.

„What will you do to me, father?” sweetly asked his tormentor. „Prop me up against the wall? I know. For a Party cry you will shoot not only your fellow countrymen, but strangle your own son.”

The father clenched his teeth and his face twitched; the son faced him, breathing heavily. Then the father tucked his brief-case under his arm and dashed to the door.

„Semion Semionovich, your hat!” offered Yura.

The incensed man thrust his hand through the doorway and lamented: „Look at what I have brought up.”

„Shut up, you scum, that will be enough for you,” summed up his son.

As you see, it is somewhat more serious than just a „bitter smirk’ of the emigre’s son.

I must observe, however, that in this particular case the son was wrong. His father did not ‘offer his luscious proletarian body’ for sale. He was an honest war-horse of the Revolution, many times wounded, badly nursed through several cases of typhus, bent under a galley slave’s toils, with his morale undermined by a growing realisation that all his efforts and sacrifices were in vain, that youth was gone and would never return, just as the lives maimed unto death in the name of a Socialist paradise will never come back. He was a victim of tuberculosis, and faced death without the slightest consolation of any success in his endeavours. His son will not shout to him, as Ostap shouted to Taras Bulba, the hero of Gogol’s Ukrainian epic, and of every aspiring father, „Can you hear me, pater?” No, he looks upon him as a bastard out of a whore; the Party, by an executioner; Stalin.

Of course, there are extenuating circumstances for the majority of the Party fathers, but the sons judge by results.

## Of the Eye-witnesses and the Muddle

Trudging across the swamps to the frontier, I have tried to imagine how I will compose my report to the expatriates, that part of the Russian people who remained free. During the years when I made up my mind to escape, I regarded myself as a scout, who must gather all available data concerning the strength and the weakness of the enemy. But I reckoned without two things, that I shall be accused of hatred of Bolshevism, and that I shall have to prove the existence of Bolshevik muddle and mismanagement.

I thought, and still think, that the detestation of a regime which consigned millions of my countrymen to premature graves is not only my right, but my duty. As a sportsman I knew only too well that one should not depend on the weakness of one's opponent. A man who faced another in the ring well understands that if he underrates the other he is inviting disaster. But when we consider Soviet inefficiency, it seems to me that all one has to do is to examine its roots, its operations, and its consequences, in order to demonstrate its existence. I was mistaken. And finally I realised that I should have to sustain my integrity as a witness before a very strict tribunal.

At any court a witness may find himself in a position akin to that of the accused, and even more so, when the future of his country is at stake. There are witnesses and witnesses.

Take M. Herriot, for one. Did he not find in the U.S.S.R. a country brimming with health and happiness? Did not M. Sokolov notice some marvellous restorations of old ikons? It was not mere hearsay with them. They saw

these wonders with their own eyes. That is why every emigre reader is entitled to suspect a witness, and to become assured of his credo and his honesty.

When speaking of the Soviet youth, which constitutes a most important part of my testimony, I feel the moral necessity of establishing my *bonafides* as a close observer, however difficult this may appear in my peculiar situation.

Among all the comments occasioned by my sketches I would like to dwell on those made by Mrs. Kuskov. First, because hers doubtless reflect the opinion of a wide reading public, and second, because I do not find there any tendency to place the interests of the Party, or the group, above those of the general community.

Mrs. Kuskov contrasts Mr. and Mrs. Tchernavin's account with mine, returning a verdict of calm considerateness in their favour while recording one of passion and hatred against me, because I am said to have distorted Soviet actuality past recognition.

One is entitled to ask, what would the true colours be? Who will be the judge competent enough to portray the colours that will best harmonise with the real hue of life under the Soviets? Mrs. Kuskov emphasises the objectivity of the Tchernavins. In that respect I concur with her completely and unreservedly; they are really objective. I have perused their narrative and conversed with them personally. They stand to the left of me politically, but in their summing up of the actual conditions, there is no disparity between us.

Other readers will agree that in one particular chapter hatred was displayed of the „Activists”, although I had not personally suffered from them. Yet of the G.P.U. investigator who was instrumental in obtaining our eight years' sentence, spoke without any animus whatsoever. Where are, then, the 'two sides of the psychology over there'?

Taking at random, out of a chaos of vicious circles of the Soviet reality, the „de-kulakizing”—the tractors, the traction power—the famine—and the komsomol, let us scrutinise them.

Stalin's report to the last conference of the Communist Party conceded that, during the first years of collectivisation, there was a loss of 19 million horses, i.e. out of the 35 million, 16 million remained in the U.S.S.R. As a matter of fact, only [?] million should be enumerated, because the horses of the Red Army have no concern with agriculture. But an admission of reduction so great must not be made. (Do not forget that the Socialist Kingdom Come is with us, Russians, only statistically so, and as we are told to believe, so we shall reap.)

Firstly, everyone understands, even in the city, that the utility of a farm horse is estimated on a periodical employment basis, and that during the ploughing and harvesting seasons the animals work throughout the day, and that it would be a physical impossibility for one quadruped to perform the agricultural labour formerly undertaken by two or three horses. Secondly, the working power of the pre-revolutionary horse, groomed and fed by an individual owner, was appreciably above that of a horse of to-day, underfed and usually communal property. This is a further reason why it is impossible to cultivate the same acreage now, as then. Neither the cattle, girls, nor women, who were compelled to step into the horse's shoes, so to say, can hope to make up the losses sustained in Ukraine and the Kuban, the chief grain provinces, of their proportion of horse power.

A record harvest is a demonstrable fact. Where, then, let us ask, did this alleged crop of 1933 come from, and whither did it go? If it were true, as we are invited to believe, that 1933 produced the heaviest crops in the agrarian history of Russia (sic!), the country must have possessed a surplus of 72 milliard pounds, and the foreign Jewish communities need not have been driven to make collections for their starving Soviet compatriots. (See A. Kerensky's article in the *Sovremennye Zapiski*, No. 57.) So much for the statistics. Now, for planning and construction.

To offset these losses, and the sacrifices in men and cattle, we have three traction plants to show: the Stalingrad, the Kharkov, and the Cheliabinsk. The official figures tell us that the production of these plants, plus the imports, total some two hundred thousand tractors. The report of the

Secretary of the Regional Committee of the Communist Party in Siberia, published in Pravda in November, 1933, shows that, under the Soviet, the productivity of ten Soviet tractors equals the productivity of eleven Soviet horses under prevailing field conditions.

It is evident, then, that in order to compensate for the 'de-kulakizing' and other losses in horse-traction power, some seventeen million tractors must be built and put into operation, and a corresponding number of mechanics must be trained, service stations built, and so forth.

But, unfortunately, Russian agriculture is far removed from this.

This is a salient example of the trustworthiness of the official statistics, the efficiency of planning, and the rapidity of construction. And all this is summed up in the common language of Russia of to-day by the expressive Turkish word *kabak*, or the road house.

## The Psychological Effects of the 'Kabak'

So the fathers dinned it into the young ears: „All together now, ep! Let's go!" And once again. Pull in your belt, never mind the hunger, push on—it's just round the comer, is our Socialist paradise.

The lads, the ingenuous youth, strained their backs and put their shoulders to the wheel, pulled in their belts, did the dirty work, died like flies by hundreds of thousands, froze on the Magnitogorsk building, faced typhus on the Dnieprostoi, malaria at the Berezniaks, scurvy at the Solikamsk, and accidents everywhere. (No industrial precautions, or labour protection, no training, no skilled labour to speak of in the storm or shock-work.)

And now, having 'filled' and 'over-filled' their quota of work, they see—the tractor junk piles; they feel the same hunger; and they understand that it is

the same old kabak. „The merry Socialist upbuilding is seething”, as the Soviet hackneyed catchword would have you believe, but the youth behold the fruit of their labour eaten with rust, and the people duped into slavery, or dead. When, after all the victories on the much united front, youth tried to speak their minds, they have very speedily found themselves in the Concentration Camps.

But the last disillusion for young manhood was the withdrawal of the food cards, a fitting gift to the victorious proletarian youth. The youngsters never bought anything in the open market, (the average student's stipend being only 60 roubles a month). Now this stipend's purchasing power is reduced to less than half by the new price adjustment. This means starvation, much aggravated by the caviar, sturgeon, and other delicacies displayed by the shops for 'visual feeding', as it is sardonically termed.

Here is another document. I am quoting part of an account in the *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, by the Secretary of the Azov Regional Committee of the Communist Party, of the 'de-kulakizing' in Kuban.

The year is not stated, but the 'de-kulakizing' goes on indefinitely, since this region cannot apparently be 'de-kulakized'.

„In the empty stanitsa, a Cossack village, the lights did not burn and the dogs did not bark. The swollen carcasses of horses were looming darkly. Every day up to fifty head of oxen and horses fell. (What of the people? Iv. S.). Out of 45 komsomols, 30 were exiled, 4 arrested for theft, and eleven fled with the 'de-kulakized'. In the spring the girls had to plough the fields. Seed had to be carried from the village on our backs, because there were no horses. (Who pulled the ploughs? The girls, again? Iv. S.).”

An article of mine on the kolkhoz village drew forth a number of indignant letters from the emigre Tolstoyists, and others, accusing me of painting the picture in dark colours. What of the *Komsomolskaya Pravda*? Did it also paint the picture too sombrely?

Free now, among the Emigres, one can discourse upon these topics calmly and without prejudice.

One feels smug, and snug, and so far from the Solovetski camps. But the Soviet student, komsomolez, peasant, and workman cannot and will not manifest such equanimity. It is one thing to condole with the father of a dead child, but quite another to bury your own, who probably died from starvation.

In the columns of the Soviet Press, the round, fresh faces of the enthusiastic 'young crop' smile at you. (I shall tell you how this is accomplished in the chapter on the 'Spartaciad') Verily, the youth are advancing. Not so round-faced and placid as in the pictures. It is a change of guard, and it is coming soon, and then it will change—drastically.

# THE SPARTACIAD

## The Dynamos Melting Away

Towards the end of May our semi-privileged position at the Camp seemed as secure as was possible in the uncertainty of existence under Soviet rule. Thus, I regarded our projected escape, or at least our release from Camp, as something assured. At one time there was a threat on the part of the Cultural-Educational Department, which very soon realised that Honey-maker was nothing more than a figurehead, and that there was no economy in paying him three hundred roubles, when they could commandeer my services for thirty. I had safeguarded myself quite simply by furnishing Dynamo with a suggestion for a new stadium. The old stadium was quite inadequate, and it was easy to select a suitable plot of ground behind the administrative town, design the structure, secure the labour, and provide the materials.

With three tractors and a hundred and fifty to two hundred Urks from the 'Shizo' labouring on the projected Dynamo, the K.V.O. conjectured that I would never obtain release. In short, all was 'quiet on my Western front'.

Then, suddenly, within three days, my apparent security was menaced on all sides, and we faced disaster.

It began with the 'terroristic' football team lists. Klebnikov proved correct in his opinion as to the complete absence of physical-culture conscious youth in the Camps, save a few students interned there for terrorism; while Golman grew more and more persistent in demanding the lists essential for the transfers to the Armed Guards. Having proffered every possible excuse, I went to Honeymaker to ask for an assignment to recruit from the Camps so far unsolicited for assistance.



„Yes, yes,” chattered Honeymaker, „this is unimportant. Mislays the lists, and for the moment don't mention them to anyone. You will only discredit yourself, you understand. I am going to Moscow, and will be back in about five days, or so, and then we will settle the matter in no time.”

How one could settle the matter, I had not the slightest conception. Moreover, Honeymaker had a very roguish appearance, as if he had something on his mind that might concern me. He went away and three days later a telegram arrived stating that he was not returning and asking us to send him his belongings in the care of the Moscow Dynamo. And that was that. There were rumours of embezzlements by the bosses of the Moscow Headquarters of Dynamo that attained astronomical figures, and a complete liquidation of the Dynamo was suggested in connection with a merger of the G.P.U. and the Commissariat of Internal Affairs.

As for the merger, by the way, it was heralded at the Camp by a curious incident. The plywood initials of W.B.C.— G.P.U. over the 'triumphal' arch at the entrance to the Third Camp were removed by a few carpenters, and „W.B.C.— N.K.V.D.’ nailed up in its place. The prisoners thronged about the new 'diversion', and tried to decipher the new letter combination in language so choice that it is unprintable. Men who knew the nature of the beast intimately, did not expect to find a new exhibition of beauty behind this new face-lifting operation. Cheka, G.P.U., N.K.V.D., what difference does it make, if the calibre of the service-revolver remains the same?

At much the same time as Honeymaker, Radetsky departed to Moscow, and I surmised that Honeymaker had found a post for him at his new office. I remained to face Golman alone. Our *tete-a-tete* was not of the most agreeable character.

The delivery of the lists took the form of an ultimatum, to which I responded with a request for a trip to the north and displayed my lists just as they 'turned out'. There was nothing else to do.

„Didn't Honeymaker speak to you about them?" I innocently inquired, while Golman noted the names, and transfixed me with a gimlet-like, Activist's eye.

„No luck for you with politics in physical culture, is there, Comrade Solonevich? Why don't you drop that business?"

„What business?"

„Both. Politics and physical culture." „I do not play with politics."

Golman looked at me sardonically, and said dryly:

„Leave the lists here. We shall investigate. I shall call you. So long."

'Investigate,' 'call,' 'So long,' were not encouraging. But the following day he did call me and, briefly and concisely, made it clear that the K.V.O. insisted on my transfer from Dynamo to themselves, with his, Golman's, approval. The work on the stadium however, I must complete while engaged with the K.V.O.

I heaved a sigh of relief. Golman was nursing the same Activist animus against me that Starodubtsev had entertained, even if it were less crude. He realised, however, that to try me too severely was impolitic, although he could not resist an occasional display of resentment.

Still, neither of us uttered a syllable concerning the troublesome lists.

## A Chat with Comrade Korzun

The K.V.O. of the W.B.C. was a Camp duplicate of the Cultural-Educational Department of the Professional Unions. The corridors of the K.V.O. were just as full of 'libworkers', 'mus workers', and 'agitpropworkers'. (Or in plain

Russian the librarians, the museum workers, and the agitation and propagandist workers.) They proceeded, grave and preoccupied, from one room to another, and appeared very, very important. I also appeared very, very important. So, whilst wandering from one room to another, I was intercepted in the corridor by Korzun.

„There you are, Comrade Solonevich; I wanted to tell you something, but damnation! I forgot what it was. Come in, perhaps I may remember.”

We went in and sat down. The walls of Korzun’s office were covered with photographs which purported to illustrate the ‘heroism in the W.B.C. construction’: the portraits of prominent shock-workers (from the ‘re-constructed’), among them a photograph of the occasion already described. There was, however, no photograph of the ‘Torgsin’ shop plundered after the exercises. I turned away from the illustrations to meet the kindly-humorous eye of my host; obviously, he knew of my advice to Smirnov in relation to the article, and the photographs that displayed the official part of the occasion.

„You have, it seems, a considerable experience in the field of cultural-education work?”

This I admitted.

„But you hardly know the difference between the philosophy of cultural work within Camp and without.”

„I think, that in principle there is no difference.”

„No, there are distinct differences. Outside, the cultural work aims at the lifting of the consciousness of the average worker to the level of the Communist. Here, in Camp, we have to elevate the social instincts,” he raised his finger, „the social working instinct, you understand, of the declassed and the counter-revolutionary part of the population to the average Soviet level.”

„Hm. Re-construction?” said I, and he looked at me askance.

„We cannot re-construct everybody. But we must destroy those we cannot ‘re-construct’.”

His statement was ridiculous on the face of it. The Camp did not really re-construct anybody, and even the Camp is unable to exterminate the millions of non-re-constructed.

„I am afraid that for a successful realisation of this programme you will have to create a mighty mechanism of extermination.”

„What of it?” Korzun’s eye was clear, open, and intelligent, and before that primitive simplicity I preserved silence. Korzun gave me a comprehensive glance.

„Do you remember Stalin’s *bon mot* on the cockroaches?” he inquired.

I remembered, because it was impossible to forget. Nothing more loathsome, depraved, and yet typical had ever been uttered by any one of the leaders of the Revolution. Stalin flung it at that part of the Communist Party which deplored the countless corpses piled up on the path to collectivisation, as well as the suffering and indignation of the people. „What, are you afraid of cockroaches?” asked Stalin disdainfully. A few million proletarians or peasants more or less was a completely indifferent item to him.

I set my teeth, and did not answer, since the only fitting retort to that would have been a lynching noose. I did not possess one.

„That is why Stalin is a leader. He is a man of thorough daring. He pauses at nothing. If it were to the advantage of the Revolution, he would kiss the Pope’s toe.”

That he would do this, I have not the slightest doubt. And again, as often happens in a confidential talk with Communists, I felt myself under the sway of a confident, clever, and utterly demoralising force—so immense, that it scorns concealment. All this conversation with Korzun was inane, superfluous, and presumably dangerous.

„You will excuse me, Comrade Korzun, if I decline to elaborate on that theme, especially here, where I am one of the cockroaches.”

„Oh, no, you are not. And what’s more, you know it perfectly well. You, of all people, must realise that we are driven to ruthlessness, and . . . strictly speaking, quite independently of the personal guilt of those whom we are constrained to extinguish. Is there any personal guilt in these waifs of ours? Of course not. . . . But there they are. . . . Here, that’s what I wanted to talk to you about. The waifs. You know our colony at the Watershed. We are organising there a second, Bolshevo.<sup>13</sup> So far, we have two thousand boys there (by the time I reached it, there were four thousand). We have decided to send you there to organise the physical culture. But you know yourself that Camp physical culture is mythical, while there it will be shock-work. To sum up—go there. You will live as a freeman, and you will have a shock-work reduction of your sentence. We have talked it over with Golman, and he urges nothing against it.” Damn the Fates! The Watershed, two hundred and fifty miles from the frontier across swamps. If I am there, Yura at Medgora, and Boris at the Lodeinoie Pole, how can we remain in contact? And so far, we have no compasses, no maps, no boots. Just a modicum of supplies. The Watershed swamp may engulf us, in more senses than one. What am I to do?

Korzun proceeds to paint a pretty picture of labour at the colony. I take out a cigarette to gain time, but the match flame dances like a sunbeam on the wall. I dare not refuse. I shall have to scrape out of it, somehow, painfully swallow humble pie, but evade it in the end.

When I left Korzun I felt dazed, after being granted a two-days respite. What shall I do? I went to the bank of the river, sat there thinking and smoking, until I had at last worked out a scheme for further postponement, and went to consult Golman concerning it. I began with a report of my complete understanding with Korzun, and intimated to Golman that I did

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<sup>13</sup> Bolshevo—a reformatory for depraved boys, near Moscow

not care how soon I parted company with him. And he cordially returned the compliment.

„Let Batushkov relieve you of your Dynamo work,” were his instructions. „Quite so, but Batushkov is not quite sober, and I would like to transfer to you, personally, some of the more important requirements of the stadium construction undertaking.”

„What sort of things?”

„The foreman has banked the running tracks inaccurately. Now they have sagged, and it is necessary to replace them. Besides, the filling which they brought for the tennis courts is good for nothing. Will you please see to it that Batushkov obtains suitable materials and . . .”

„You have bungled that construction job, and now you want me and Batushkov to hold the bag for you? Nothing doing! And you will go to no colonies until you finish this job properly. Get busy on that job immediately and stay on it till it is finished.”

„I beg your pardon, but Comrade Korzun ordered. . . .” I assumed an appearance of disappointment.

„None of your business, what he ordered. Get busy with the stadium.”

## The Plan for the Colossal ‘Khaltura’

Some reprieve was thus gained. But what now? I discussed the situation with Yura, and he suggested immediate flight, only to withdraw it shamefacedly. For it was scarcely possible to inform Boris of a change of plan, so that he could also escape immediately. To attempt escape before the time mutually agreed upon, would mean the betrayal of Boris, to expose him

to a firing squad, or perhaps transport to the Urals or the Solovetsky Islands. There were no means of communicating with him and obtaining an answer, and any attempt would be perilous.

All the time I could spare from the constructive work, I spent in the woods frantically determined to discover an outlet. I mentally revolved the master chart of every Soviet relation and reaction, and all I discerned was the necessity for devising with promptitude, some specious and persuasive imposition, an unheard of 'khaltura', which might prove of personal advantage to some prominent Communist in authority.

Something that would offer to Korzun, or to Verjbitsky, let us say, a fine opening for promotion was needed. Cultural-Educational, Technico-Productional, and other no less impressively titled plans, materialised in my imagination, only to be dismissed for insufficient attractiveness, until by a long process of deletion, I conceived the grandiose scheme of an All-camp Spartaciad<sup>14</sup> for the entire W.B.C.

Probably I was not altogether rational in my behaviour in those days, for Yura remarked, when he met me on the way to the Technicum:

„Stop muttering to yourself, Dad, or you will become completely crazy.” I tried not to mumble any longer.

But the next day I wormed my way into the machine superintendent's office, and managed to get the use of a typewriter for a report of my latest brain child, addressed to the Chief of all the Camps, Comrade Uspensky. I presented my Spartaciad as the final and complete demonstration of the success of the Soviet corrective system, which would silence the bourgeois slander that the Camps were mere machinery for human extinction, with more in the same vein. With a little strategy, I managed to dispatch this report directly to Uspensky, over the heads of Korzun and Golman.

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<sup>14</sup> On the lines of the Olympic games, in Soviet Russia called— Spartaciad

While awaiting an answer, I frequented the woods, wandering about in a mood of expectation, longing for the day of our escape, the gaining of freedom, or to remain in captivity indefinitely.

Sometimes I could see how chimerical the plan for the Spartaciad must appear, and almost hoped that Uspensky would throw it into the waste-paper basket, and forget all about it. Or, I might imagine it as just the thing to captivate the fancy of those on whose good will all our lives depended. The plan was a farcical instance of khaltura.

It was patently a publicity stunt, but it was not completely fantastic or impossible, and, if successful, would raise a stepping stone for Uspensky's advancement. Then, on sober reflection, I realised that if a project is feasible, it will never be rejected merely because it is too obviously brazen. I could not credit the regime with more conscience than it possessed. Why should I expect any conscientious scruples in Uspensky, when I never experienced them in Party leaders outside the Camp?

All the accounts of Uspensky pictured him as a very clever man, autocratic and utterly ruthless, as any young Party administrator must be to achieve a rapid success. His conscience had been sullied by the sacrifice of countless thousands. No, a man like that will not reject an opportunity to inscribe his name over a grandiose project. He will swallow my 'khaltura' bait, hook, line, and sinker. And, if he refuses, then I know nothing of the internal workings of the great Soviet 'kabak'. He ought to leap to my bait, and he will unquestionably do so!

I was expecting a call in a couple of days, and quite probably Uspensky's secretary might visit Golman. But the very same evening the Chief of the Column hurriedly entered the barrack, and called out breathlessly:

„Where is Comrade Solonevich, Ivan, the senior? You must report immediately to Comrade Uspensky. Hurry. . . .” I had had no particular intimacy with this chief and, except for casual remarks now and then to maintain his official standing, the man appeared slightly on the defensive, as



if he wanted to make me understand that, despite my spectacles, he could always make matters unpleasant.

Now he was simply bewildered, and did not know what to think, and being a small cog in the wheel, he seemed craven. Why did Uspensky himself want to see me? This was too much for him! Yura, diplomatically and calmly, deepened the mystery. „Good-night, Dad, you won't be back again until the 'wee small' hours of the morning.”

„All right, then, Comrade, I'll 'phone the office that you are on your way, shall I?” „Go ahead, I'll be right along,” said I, with all the calm and phlegm to be expected in connection with a workaday call upon the Chief of the Camp!

## The Napoleon of the Solovetsky Islands

The Chief of the Supply Department and a few others were in the waiting-room when I arrived. I sat down and looked about me. These people were all well fed, clean shaven, and well clad in new Cheka uniforms, all the 'higher ups' of the Camp G.P.U. I was the only one in prisoner's dress and felt like a proletarian through and through. There, facing me, was a ponderous, mournful old man, Pokkaln, the Chief of the Medgora G.P.U. He glanced at me disapprovingly. Between us there is a long chain of the Camp hierarchy, any one member of which could hoist me higher than a kite whenever the spirit moved him, to the 19th Division or worse. Pokkaln can elevate them all, and me, a mere gnat, he could remove from the face of the earth with his mere breath. Now you can imagine how cosy the room seemed, with all those G.P.U. aristocrats in the company, and with a long wait in prospect for me. I had heard that Uspensky worked in his study, sometimes for twenty-four hours, and compelled his subordinates to wait for him for the same

length of time. Well, as my sentence was a long one and as I had a very comfortable chair, I was in no hurry.

But the door opened, and a spick and span secretary announced: „Comrade Solonevich, if you please.” I ‘pleased’ and followed him.

Pokkain’s face changed from disapproval to stupefaction. The Chief of Supplies, whose turn it was to see the mighty one next, had risen at the sight of the secretary, and clutched his brief-case; he stood now in the middle of the room, nonplussed. I had all I could do to prevent myself from dancing: „He struck!”

An immense apartment furnished with austere luxury met my sight. Behind an enormous desk sat Uspensky, a comparatively young man of about thirty-five, heavily built, with light almost colourless eyes set in an intelligent, forceful face. I could see why they called him the Napoleon of the Solovetsky Islands. You could not „pull the wool over his eyes”. Nor was it wool that I intended to pull over, either.

He did not merely look at me, but scanned me as if he were studying me with a delicate scientific instrument. Waving with his cigarette, he said:

„Take a seat.” I did. „Your project?” „Mine.”

„How long in camp?” „About six months.”

Hm. Not much experience. Know the conditions in Camp?”

„Enough to be certain of success for my project. Otherwise I would not have submitted it.”

Uspensky is alert, and even sceptical.

„I have good reports about you. But there is very little time. Climatic conditions do not allow us to set the fiesta later than the middle of August. I advise you to think it over very carefully.”

„Citizen Chief, I have thought out every detail.” „Tell me about them.”

At the end of my report, Uspensky glanced at me with approval. I surveyed him in very much the same manner, and we both resembled a couple of mildly artful augurs.

„Have a cigarette. So you undertake to put it in order? But take care that we don't both fall down on the task!" „Comrade Uspensky, I can do nothing alone, of course; but with the assistance of the Camp administration. . . ."  
„Don't worry about that. Draft for my signature all the orders, as we talked them over. I shall give my personal instructions to Pokkaln. . . ."

„He is there, in the waiting-room."

„So much the better," he pressed a button. „Ask Pokkaln in." Pokkaln is shown in, and, for a moment, there is a mute adjustment and finding of bearings—Pokkaln, standing more or less at attention, and I, a worm in comparison, sitting cross-legged in a big arm-chair in front of the desk, and exhaling rings from an administrative cigarette.

„Here is what we are going to do, Comrade Pokkaln. We shall organise an 'All-camps' Spartaciad, with Comrade Solonevich in charge. Will you please take charge of the following: provide a special supply of improved diet for sixty men for two months, arrange for a special barrack for them and for people to supervise it, and furnish enough man-power to build the training grounds. That will be all, I think, Comrade Solonevich?"

„That will be all, at present."

„You will explain the details to Comrade Pokkaln yourself. But, Comrade Pokkaln, you must understand that the Spartaciad has a very important political significance, and that the preliminaries must be conducted—'under the rating of a military order'."

„I understand, Comrade Chief."

Devil a bit did he understand! He had never heard of a Spartaciad, and does not know what to eat it with, nor why it should have an important political significance, nor why it should be carried out 'in military order', nor why I,

a down-at-heel bespectacled prisoner should sit there, as if I belonged to the room, while he, Pokkaln, stands at attention. His gloomy, honest Lettish brain will never comprehend it.

„Comrade Solonevich will direct the Spartaciad, and you must help him in every possible way. If you are in any difficulty, call on me. And you, too, Comrade Solonevich. You may go, Comrade Pokkaln, I have no time to receive your report this evening.”

Pokkaln turned about and marched out. I stayed and felt as if I were living through the pages of the Thousand and One Nights.

Pokkaln probably felt much the same, although I am positive he had never heard of the ‘1001 Nights’.

Great is the power of Caliph Uspensky! And who shall understand his ways? By reason of his wisdom, the Caliph can call unto himself the humblest slave of the prison camp, and from the disreputable barrack, seat him next to the Caliph himself. By the same marvellous zig-zag, the Caliph Uspensky can order his ‘Grandvizier’ Pokkaln to the darkest cell—may be for a time, and maybe forever. Who knows?

And this same Caliph, at Stalin’s whim, could face the firing squad! After Pokkaln had gone, I was left alone with Uspensky.

„Here is one moot point, though. Tell me, why such an assortment of paragraphs?” he asked.

I have mentioned elsewhere that the G.P.U. does not acquaint the Camp administration with the details of the crime for which the prisoner is sentenced. Only the paragraph and its subdivision are given. Thus, Uspensky was completely ignorant of the causes of my incarceration. He could not suppose that I was engaged in espionage (prg. 58/6), that I worked in a counter-revolutionary organization (prg. 58/11), nor that I smuggled Soviet citizens abroad (which is quite an industry) (prg. 58/10). The paragraph which imposed at that time a sentence of three years for an illegal crossing of the frontier, the G.P.U. had been too lenient to impose upon me.

Uspensky was unable to credit the nonsense contained in that string of paragraphs because people who are sentenced for all these crimes in good earnest, are shot, or receive what is known as 'the bird', and are sent straight to Solovki, without sojourning anywhere. The absence of the 'birdie', the eight year sentence, instead of the normal ten, is the customary official sign-manual of a trumped-up charge.

Besides, Uspensky knew that any given clause of the Soviet Criminal Code may be applied to anyone, on the general principle: secure the man and then we shall find a suitable clause for him.

I know what Uspensky is afraid of. Not that I am a spy, a counter-revolutionary, or what not, but that I may be a 'khalturchik' in reduced circumstances; that maybe I have undertaken some large enterprise unsuccessfully. There is nothing in the Criminal Code to sentence any one for that, in which case he is simply imprisoned, but the clause, or paragraph makes no reference whatever to the real offence.

It is uncertainty that harasses Uspensky. He does not desire a failure on his hands. If I fail with the Spartaciad, he will devour me alive, but that will not help him in the least. All he requires then, is an assurance of my 'khaltura' qualifications.

I put him at his ease. I am in Camp for 'contact with abroad', and I serve my time with my son. This finally dismisses his fears of my possible failure.

„Well, Comrade, I think this is all now.” He rose. „I hope you will get everything under way in first-rate style, and if we succeed with it. I guarantee you a reduction of your sentence by one half.”

He is unaware, of course, that I do not intend to tarry here for even a quarter of my sentence, but I thank him all the same. He looks at me fixedly.

„If you need anything, tell me now,” he said. „How are your living conditions?”

„Thank you, but I am sufficiently well placed.” He lifted his eyebrows at this.  
„I prefer not to take any instalment, but I hope that after the Spartaciad. . . .”

„If you succeed, you will have nothing left to wish for. And it seems likely to me that you will make a job of it.” And we survey each other again like two rogues who understand each other.

„Remember, if you need anything, speak frankly.” But I did not. With things as they stood now, I could get anything I wanted without Uspensky, and I did not want to squander my newly acquired ‘social capital’.

With a firm step I returned through the dark alley to my barrack. Yura was asleep.

## Introduction to the Philosophy of the ‘Khaltura’

I shall now attempt to unravel the secret of our conference. It goes without saying that any serious endeavour to elevate physical culture to its proper altitude at Camp was entirely out of the question. It is hard to offer soccer to a man who works up to twelve hours a day on insufficient nourishment, with poor clothing, within a stone's throw of the Arctic circle. How easily I could arrive with my physical culture at the 19th division?

So I made it clear to Uspensky at the very outset that I entertained no visionary idea of improving any one's health or deportment, thereby relieving him of the thankless task of telling me that it could not be done. I did not intend to do anything for physical culture itself, and that was my trump card.

But I undertook to arrange the whole display so that there would be crowds, records, and publicity of the required character in Moscow and in the friendly foreign Press. Also, there would be photographs, films,

headlines, and the rest of the balderdash. I proposed to arrange what in our time passes for documentary evidence in the pages of magazines, on the screen, and so forth, to the effect that the Soviets even take care of the bandits, the counter-revolutionaries, the wreckers, and the like; and intimate that these reports, these photographs, and films are the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; while all else is merely lousy bourgeois defamation, and deliberate lying about 'atrocities', 'hunger', and 'deaths'.

*The Daily Worker* and *L'Humanité*, which are as ignorant as dirt concerning the technique of this particular 'khaltura', will rave about the Spartaciad all over England, France, and perhaps America, and, I will even admit, quite honestly, if inaccurately, Maxim Gorky, who is cognisant of the real value of the whole concern, as much so as Uspensky or myself, will pen a Kremlin-inspired and pandering article in Pravda, and telegraph the W.B.C. his congratulations. The article will likewise be reviewed at its real value by the convicts, but certainly not for publication, and in terms defying translation into any of the well-bred languages of the world, terms that even a down-at-heel Urk would not apply to the lowest syphilis-smitten prostitute, for he, a prisoner, knows what makes the wheels go round in Russia, and is aware that Gorky, that pussyfoot pet of many regimes, knows it likewise.

The seamy side of the 'khaltura' will be obvious to anyone whose duty it is to know, such as the G.P.U., the G.U.L.A.G., and the Higher Council of Physical Culture; but in their judgment Uspensky will appear a man who devised this scheme, unreal or divorced from life as it is, *ad majorem Stalini gloriam*, to make capital among the capitalists. Uspensky, himself, will garner in some unearned profits in the only real coin of the Russian realm, Communistic prestige in the prevailing Party group.

We were both satisfied with our project; we both knew and appreciated the background of the whole affair, and each in his own way enjoyed the satisfaction of using the other for his own ends. In reality, without knowing it, he was helping me to escape, while I was advancing him to higher administrative rewards.

## The Administrative Tornado

Three days after my conference with Uspensky, the following orders were issued: Every copy of *Re-construction* throughout the entire territory of the Baltic-White-Sea Combine, must publish, not later than June 12th, a leading article on the Spartaciad. To all departmental chiefs: to select instructors, teams, etc., under their *personal* responsibility; and to make a report on progress, in person to the Chief of the W.B.C., Comrade Uspensky, every workweek (five-day week).

(This order was worded in a most peremptory manner. There was so little time, Uspensky said, that we must bend over backwards a little.)

To exempt all team members from work and compulsory presence at Socialist gatherings. All transfers from camp to camp are forbidden.

A special barrack in the near-by resort Vichka is to be put at the disposal of the sixty participants in the Spartaciad. A special food supply to be reserved for the entire period of training and competition.

To appropriate 50,000 roubles for the purchase of sporting equipment.

7, 8. Secret orders to the G.P.U., armed guards, and Dynamo to render me any assistance required.

When all of these were signed, sealed, and delivered, I had a temporary respite: *feci quod potui*. The future was in the lap of the Gods.

Paradoxically it seems that, for the asking, I could have been supplied with a motor car. There was a settlement of administrative prisoners about 50 miles West of Medgora, and Yura and I discussed the feasibility of applying for an assignment to recruit the teams there. It would take us almost half-way to the border. But I preferred five days of rough crosscountry journeying to the risk of arousing suspicion by taking an automobile trip.



## A Key to the Casket of Enthusiasm

A second-rate Spartaciad, such as the Baltic-White-Sea Combine, is merely an apology for a khaltura, it is not to be compared with a 'Five-Year Plan in 4 Years' production; with the stupendous Soviet steel plants at Magnitogorsk; nor with the scheme for publishing all Soviet literature on an industrial propagandist scale.

But the mightiness of Allah reveals itself even in his most modest creations. The 'khaltura' procedure of the W.B.C. Spartaciad is applied alike in Moscow Spartaciads, in every kind of industrial enterprise; in the various literary, or any other example of Soviet organisation. All these varied undertakings result in the huge conglomeration of all the Soviet Union 'khalturas' with a capital K.

The key to the casket containing the recipes warranting the success of the W.B.C. Spartaciad (which, alas, did not materialise), can unlock most other Soviet 'Khaltura' jewel cases. I cannot say whether my story will prove interesting but it will certainly impart instruction.

The opening of the Spartaciad was fixed for August 15th, and a reader unversed in Soviet technique might well inquire how I expected, in a couple of months, to produce from the void the enthusiasm, crowds, sport records, as well as other requirements. To the initiated reader I will reply, without any apology for candour:

„Precisely in the same manner that I had previously produced them at the Spartaciad in Moscow, and precisely as such things are conducted throughout Soviet Russia.”

For the purpose of producing sport records, there are in the U.S.S.R. several hundred professional athletes, who receive good pay and special food

rations. For the production of 'enthusiasm', there are several thousands of Soviet komsomol youths, not so well fed, but well trained and organised. The crowds number many thousands who, as soon as the order is issued, will play the part of 'Popular Masses', at any time and for any purpose—a Spartaciad, the arrival of Maxim Gorky, or the reception of Ammanulla, King of Afghanistan. The occasion is immaterial—the order is the chief concern.

In my case, I shall have fifty or sixty athletes for sport records, and these I shall lodge at the resort barrack of Vichka, where they will gorge themselves with provender such as they could not dream of at other times. Uspensky will take care of the supplies, while I see that the cooks steal nothing.

The athletes will do nothing but eat, sleep, and train. Among them there will be twenty or thirty former instructors of physical culture, expert professionals.

I should like to mention that in Russian sport, just as in the 'Five-Year Plan', there happen to be elements of non-'khaltura' character. In fact you may frequently meet men of fabulous strength in Russia. Many times before the Revolution I, though a man of exceptional constitution and of many years' training, was beaten even in my special kind of sport, by quite ordinary people who had never had any previous experience in sport. Among these were shepherds, mechanics, high school boys, in short, every imaginable occupation. It is an old story, but at the time a bitter one to me.

If one can spare time to look, one may find personalities in the Camps also, such as the Siberian giant in No. 19. Some of these people I had already found at Camp No. 5, although they were not as powerful as those just mentioned. These were somewhat under-nourished; but when supplied for a time with nourishing food, they soon regained their strength. Meanwhile I needed about ten more men, but I was sure I'd find them.

If the record figures do not completely satisfy me, there will be nothing to obstruct the performance of the same operation that the Soviet Commissar for Heavy Industry had conducted with the statistics of the coal output. I

personally had to participate in this manipulation. Where is the sage who can subsequently determine how many tons of coal were actually worked in the mines, and how many were fabricated in the Commissar's Office? Who could verify whether the prisoner Ivanov had really covered a hundred metres in 11.2 seconds? The chronometers will be in my keeping, and the judges-will be duly in-formed. Uspensky would be satisfied if the stated figures were satisfactory, and, if a little elaborated, then in a manner to banish suspicion, or in any case without obvious inaccuracy.

(All the preliminary arrangements will be made for the opening of the Spartaciad on August 15th—but we have timed our escape for July 28th.)

Further, the part of myriads of enthusiasts will be performed by two or three hundred Armed Guards, Soviet operators, and members of the G.P.U. All these people are nourished, trained, and coached for every species of 'enthusiasm'. They will create the general sporting background—they will shout; they will provide the round smiling faces for the close-ups.

Finally I shall mobilise one-third of the population of Medgora for the masses. This third will march in 'strong columns'; some will carry banners with Communistic slogans. For this display the prisoners will receive an extra ration of bread and be released from work for two or three days; if the Spartaciad proves successful, I can even give all the performers a white roll each. Uspensky will then appear the soul of generosity.

These extra rations are the only benefits I can confer on the 'Popular Masses'. But even these are relative—this same bread will be taken from other masses, for whom I can do nothing at all. I have no alternative save the exploitation of Uspensky for this purpose, then escape abroad; and once there, cry aloud to all the Christian and non-Christian world concerning the wretched plight of the people.

Here, in the Camp, I can't protest. I can't even speak. If I did, I should be murdered in the first G.P.U. cell. There would be no obituary even in Reconstruction, not to mention the Moscow Pravda. Not even my brother would know how I had vanished.

## The Spring board to the Frontier

Of course I was not quite true to myself, but what was I to do? In the first place, I did not invent this system of compulsory all-union Saint Vitus' dance, and in the second—they were asking for trouble. *Paris vaut la messe*.

But in place of Paris, I myself will possess full freedom of action, and almost unlimited „graft”.

Now I can enter the Administrative Department and, in tones friendly but authoritative, ask for an assignment and a pass to such-and such a place. The Open Sesame will be delivered to me at the barrack that very night, and no Third Division of the G.P.U. will stamp it: „To proceed under guard,” as in an earlier instance.

And no Armed Guard, no ‘Popka’, will presume to stop me on my way to the cache or search my provision-filled knapsack, for I shall provide that he is made aware of my great project with Uspensky, and of a few other circumstances, of which more anon.

It is in my power to confer such blessings as „sneakers”, or to withhold them. If I withhold them, he will have to walk in the issue boots that weigh one down, or on his own unshod soles.

I can guarantee, if it comes to that, six weeks of plenty, of peace and contentment, to the comrade in charge of the canteen. He can turn up his nose at the food and say:

The sway of Soviet we hold in contempt, Your gifts do not mean a great deal.

We know all the ropes and, from starving exempt, We gorge on the best at each meal.

But of vacation, even a single day of vacation, denied him during his six years in camp, he is dreaming of a promised land. He purloins, not so much for himself as for his superiors, and he is eternally afraid, not for himself but for them. If he gets into trouble himself, it is nothing; he has protection, he need only remain silent. But if his superiors meet with trouble, it may be the end of him.

They will leave him to face the music, somewhere in the Rotten River.

And the comrade will lick his lips, gaze dreamily out of the window up at the sky, no so blue as his native heavens, only a Karelian sky, but sky nevertheless, and will heave a sigh of despondency.

„A month and a half! Even a day and a half. . . . But, Comrade Solonevich, nothing will come of it. . . . They won't let me go. . . .”

But I shall reply with careless conviction: „You leave that to me, Comrade.”

So I mean to go to Doroshenko, Chief of the Camp where I can expect one of two typical solutions. If the Chief is clever and properly informed, he will grant permission without a word. Or, if it is really difficult to let the man go, he will frankly advise me, as a man of the world, to interview Pokkaln.

But if he is a damned fool, and tactless enough to tell me to go to hell, I shall see to it that he pays dearly for his lack of manners. Not because I am naturally vindictive, but because I owe it to my new position, and the manner in which a normally constituted citizen ought to behave.

But Doroshenko will be reasonable, since he now knows of my 'graft' with Uspensky. He will allow the canteen man to depart. If not, I shall have to repeat my request to Pokkaln, who will pretend to be at a loss and at my mercy, offer me the freedom of his cigarette case, and try to circumvent me.

„You know, Comrade Solonevich, how difficult it is to find a substitute for him, and especially for a month and a half.”

„Of course, I know, Comrade Pokkaln,” I shall admit the difficulty of training a new man (in all the intricacies of pilfering for his superiors), „That is why I had to come to you. You, of all people, understand how politically important it is to put over the Spartaciad.”

Politically! This is a word to conjure with, a word to bring to a dead stop any administrative high horse. It is so pregnant with inscrutable possibilities; with the Comintern, no less alluring than all the spices of Arabia; with the ‘general Party line’! as trustworthy a guide as a Fata Morgana; or the interest of the World Revolution that claims a voluntary surrender of a tithe of your salary, and mischief knows what all. Behind that mystical formula stand the seven deadly sins, which attend the Communist the moment he is born. Failure to appreciate the situation, is one of these. So universal and so intense is it that it is expressed by a phrase. The ‘flagging of class vigilance’, insidious and invisible until apprehended; orbeing in league with the class enemy, baffling and intangible. . . .

With Uspensky’s warning still ringing in his ears, Pokkaln will respond nobly and allow the canteen man his liberty.

But in the improbable event of Pokkaln’s refusal, I can go to Uspensky and tell him that my canteen man is the pride of the Spartaciad, that he can do a hundred metre dash in 10 seconds, but that ‘for perfectly obvious reasons’, the administration of the Camp does not want to let my man go. Uspensky would stand on firmer ground if the records of the Spartaciad were above suspicion; and besides he, a patrician Communist, does not care with what degree of efficiency the prisoners’ sugar allowance melts in the administrative tea glasses. But I shall get my man!

In the same manner I can get the food checker from the Engineers’ and Technicians’ Restaurant, and many other people whom I cannot very well mention. But even a pre-judiced reader will understand that I shall suffer no shortage of sugar, and shall have as much of E.T.W. borshch as I can possibly eat. So, in the health resort, I have kept a score of berths vacant for just such log-rolling, or in case our escape is prevented, on account of sickness, for instance.

No, I shall not bother anyone for sugar or anything else. I shall not need it. And, besides, it is only a hypothetical case. Of other instances, that actually occurred and provided each of us with a compass, a pair of boots, a raincoat, a pass and, most important of all, a map, no matter how meagre, I cannot speak for obvious reasons. But they developed along the same lines as the hypothetical case, since the appeal for rest, complete rest for six weeks, was common to all, whether armed guards or G.P.U. operatives.

Here is another instance, which was not hypothetical. I was in the corridor passing Pokkaln's office, when I heard him venting his 'mother tongue' on Comrade Levin, my Chief of Column, who was feebly replying. I had nothing to discuss with Pokkaln, but I wished to impress Levin by walking in unannounced, and without waiting for my turn. Ostentatiously giving Levin a wide berth, I took the chair at Pokkaln's desk, and crossing my legs comfortably, regarded Levin with patronizing sympathy.

„Poor devil, you are getting it in the neck, aren't you?"

A little background will display the importance of that curious scene. I live in Barrack 15, where my immediate superiors are: the statistician, the head of the barrack, and two orderlies, to say nothing of the 'elective' officers, the 'plenipotentiary for fighting against shirking', the 'troika for combating escapes', the 'troika for Socialistic competition and shock-work', and others. Before all that 'vested authority of the proletariat', I am like a withered leaf before a gale. The orderly may desire to know why I take an eighty-pound knapsack when I go away for two days, and he may open it for inspection.

You apprehend the consequences for me, and mine, if he does. The 'troika for combating escapes' have the right to search me at any time they feel inclined to do so. The head of the barrack may assign me to some very awkward fatigue duty just when I least want it, or may overturn my apple-cart before the administration. The Chief of the Column may order me to join a call for 'all hands', or re-assign me to a loathsomely Urk- and vermin-infested barrack; and send my son elsewhere, or list me as a malingerer or as an anti-social and anti-Soviet element, and thus pave the way to Rotten River and the hereafter.

Over the Column Chief is the Chief of the U.R.CH., who can do more to the Column Chief than he can do to me, and what he can do to me, one can merely surmise. As I soar higher and higher, I still see the monumental figure of the Chief of the Camp who can reduce me to dust. Beyond him, there is the Chief of the Department, before whom the convict is powerless. In short, up to the Column Chief, one's superiors are a bugbear, more or less serious; up to the Camp Chief, they suggest one's being buried alive at such spots as Morsplav, the Rotten River, or the Popov Island; or in the 19th Division, the Chief of the Department has the decision of life or death, the authority of courts martial, without much court.

By the time one's 'case' reaches him, one has lost one's identity, and becomes an object lesson with whom the Soviets illustrate their theory.

All these superiors remain as such, on the one hand, but, on the other, they begin to reckon with the unknown consequences of my relations with Uspensky. As a convict I am at the mercy of anyone below Pokkaln and above Levin; but, as a man in charge of the Spartaciad, which, as they have been told or gathered for themselves, is very important 'politically', I can go over their heads, and goodness only knows what I can disclose of thievery, drunkenness, the 'kick-back' from the Camp prostitutes, the 'dead souls' on the lists of the mess-halls, and many other anomalies which make the ordinarily humdrum life of the administration more thrilling.

So here I am, lounging in Pokkaln's chair, smoking his cigarette, and observing the beads of sweat on Levin's brow. Pokkaln remembers that there is company present, and that the language he had been using to Levin is frowned upon, at least officially, so he tries to excuse himself.

„Now, you see for yourself, what can I do with such people?”

„Why, of course, Comrade Pokkaln, one cannot help that,” I shrug in complete agreement. „It is only a question of trained men on the staff. We are all suffering from that, are we not?”

„Get out!” he dismisses Levin briskly.



Levin pops out of the room like a cork out of a bottle, and having popped, will praise Allah again and again that he had not „done me dirt” recently enough for me to remember. He realises that I helped to conciliate Pokkaln, and soften the interview into a peaceful ‘ending’. Whereas, if he would live without letting me live, I might say:

„What can you expect of him? There is constant thieving and carousing in their cabin.”

Naturally, he knows all this as well as I do, and quite probably he would like to do something about it, this being his direct duty. But how is he to cope with it, when the whole administration in Camp and out, is a system of thieving. It is useless to imprison a man in the Shizo, when his successor will repeat the offence. It is hard to reform a machine. This holds true under any political system!

That is why Pokkaln surveys it, as we say, through his fingers. But if I were to mention larceny and other misdeeds to him, his assumption would be that I might reveal matters to Uspensky, which would put an entirely different complexion on the subject, since Uspensky’s office is not to administer, but to ‘shake up’ periodically. The higher officials are there to prevent the system of administration from settling into any definite shape. Constant flux must be maintained not only in the personnel, but in the collective habits of the administrative body.

This is so much a part of Soviet life, that one finds one’s bearings almost automatically. Levin knows now that I have no grudge against him, and that I am willing to play the game. He will see to it that I shall have no cause to complain against him, and he will acquaint his boon companions concerning my general standing with the higher-ups. He realises that, in case of real trouble, he would emerge, not just into the corridor, but to Shizo, to the summary court and up the Rotten River, and that, among other parts I can personate, there is that of an eye-witness.

„Give the goggle-eyed guy a wide berth. You can never tell what sort of ‘graft’ he has with Pokkain and Uspensky.” This Levin will tell his cronies, and I shall prosper, while no one will rifle my pockets, nor my knapsack.

## The Results

As a result of this „graft” I obtained up to July 28<sup>th</sup> two outings from Camp for myself, which was comparatively simple; two trips for Yura, which with our clauses and paragraphs and the similarity of names, was not so simple; two single passes for each of us, for an emergency. This Spartaciad has simply saved our lives. No matter how carefully I planned the details of our escape, trying to forestall all likely contingencies, I overlooked one. I made the trip to our cache in the forest where our equipment was hidden, about ten times, without ever meeting an outpost, a picket, or a sentry. I was led to believe that I had found an unguarded spot. But when I went there, for the last time, to escape, with a hundred pound load of provisions and equipment, a compass, and a map in my pocket, I came upon a patrol of two G.P.U. operatives. . . . Fate!

I faced for a moment the dilemma of arrest and shooting, or a fight with two armed men, with very slender chances of success. But the patrol passed along, knowing better than to ask me, a potential mischief-maker, for my pass, or for the contents of my knapsack.

Had I stayed at the W.B.C., I might have carried out the Spartaciad as planned. *L'Humanité* would have been wild with enthusiasm, and Gorky would have pealed forth his approbation, and delighted his friends of the Soviet Union. I should have enjoyed a life far better than in freedom abroad, much better than my former colleagues at Moscow, without having done anything to earn it.

But that is not very praiseworthy, is it?

No, that is utterly repugnant. But that is life, as it is under the Soviets. . . .

Millions of people die from hunger and of other pre-ventible causes, and it is hard to believe that they never desire to protest, to offer some resistance, or strive to avoid their fate. And truly enough, attempts to avoid such fate accompany humdrum Soviet life. It is all in the day's work, since there is no one to protest to, and open resistance means hastening the end.

Cine should not attempt to reduce that life to a schematic two-dimensional division of the people into executioners on the one hand, and dumb driven sheep on the other. The so-called executioners are slaves, too. Even Uspensky is a slave to Yagoda, and Yagoda to Stalin! The psychology of slavery, subservience, dissimulation, thievery, and 'khaltura' pervades life, conditions it, and hence evolves it.

There is no God but the World Revolution, and Stalin is its prophet. There is no Right but Revolutionary Expediency, and Stalin is its only interpreter. A unit of humanity is no longer an Individuum. The impersonal groups within the „masses”, their physical bodies and the prospects of their immortal souls, are sacrificed in the flames of the World Conflagration.

## The Sub-Arctic Cucumbers

The administrative cyclone generated in the rarefied atmosphere of Uspensky's office, had duly struck the Camp administration of all ranks. In about two days I was called to Pokkaln, in a very diplomatic manner through Comrade Doroshenko, the Camp Chief, who intimated that Pokkaln wanted to see me, and if I had time, would I be good enough to call.

I did, and he was exceedingly polite for very good reasons. The general order to all the department heads called for a weekly report to Uspensky on the progress of the Spartaciad, and Pokkaln had not the faintest conception of what to report, or what was expected of him. I was equally polite, and between us we concocted something that looked like a report, but I warned him that I worked on a W.B.C. scale, and that as to Medgora, he would have to engage someone to relieve him of the work. There was no likelihood that he would find any one at hand, which opened the way for my suggestion that he employed Yura, for the time being. This he met with due appreciation, and Yura was appointed sports' instructor at Medgora. This was a long step towards our escape. Then we selected out the quarters for the Spartaciad teams.

I suggested Camp Yichka, about six miles west of Medgora, because it offered several advantages to me, which, however, I did not need, later. Pokkaln immediately telephoned to the Vichka Camp Chief and advised him of the approaching arrival of Comrade Solonevich, entrusted with important political requirements, and acting under personal orders from Comrade Uspensky. This so impressed the Chief that he received me much as Comrade Khlestakov, the spurious Inspector-General, was received by Comrade Skvozniak-Dmuhanovsky, the genuine mayor, in Gogol's comedy.

Vichka itself is a sufficiently curious product of Soviet constructive enterprises. About six acres of land had been cleared of stumps and stones, the pits filled, and the ground graded to accommodate the hot-houses which now supply the G.P.U. dining rooms and distributing centres.

At Moscow the replacement of a broken window pane calls for a great deal of patience and red tape, but here six acres were covered with glass-houses, as nothing could be allowed to interfere with the gastronomical comforts of those loyal supporters of the Soviets, the G.P.U. Only a few miles from the Arctic Circle, yet their table was graced with cucumbers, tomatoes, cantaloupes, and water-melons.

A meagre supply of horse manure, carefully collected in all parts of the W.B.C., was brought down by special trains. Armed Guards made forays

upon adjacent villages, and requisitioned cattle manure, while prisoners did the work. Yes, it takes a great deal of people's money and sweat to build a classless society, but when it is built, anyone who understands its structure can become a man with a gun, and eat melons in the sub-arctic zone. Another five years of planning, and the Turkestan G.P.U. will have their own icecream plants. But, by that time, the end may be near at hand.

I arrived at Vichka in the double capacity of an honoured yet somewhat doubtful guest. The Camp Chief could not quite credit all this agitation about a game called football, and his wary eye said as much. He lent me his senior agronomist, also a prisoner, who took me round, and displayed all his truck garden achievements to the best I here was precious little to display. The anaemic cucumbers and lettuce were there, but the tomatoes and melons were so far only planned. It was all very scientific and expressed in weighty learned terms, like the mastering of the sub polar massifs, the extension of Socialistic agriculture to the Ultima Thule: In the Bolshevik lexicon, there is no such word as 'impossible'!

Nor is there anything impossible, when labour is regarded as unlimited capital, bearing its own interest, and suffering no loss. With such 'free' labour to invest, why not grow coconuts at the North Pole? What does it matter that, at one hundredth of the cost of Vichka's hot-houses, tomatoes could be brought from the Ukraine to cover Medgora completely? True that as a result of similar artifices, tomatoes ceased growing in the Ukraine.

My agronomist turned out to be an enthusiast—one of those who sustain enthusiasm by confounding coming times with the present.

„All this, you understand, is nothing but a beginning. Only the first steps of agriculture on the road to mastering the North. As soon as the power-house on the Kumsa is completed, we shall heat our hot-houses with electricity.”

So they will probably heat their hot-houses with electricity. The plan for an eighty metre high dam across the River Kumsa for a hydro-electric station is almost completed. The construction itself will eventually be carried out by convict labour, and erected over a bed of convict skeletons. A moujik, like

Akulshin, instead of staying home and growing tomatoes by the hundredweight, will rot somewhere under the dam, and as for tomatoes, there will be none. Neither in the Ukraine, nor in the North.

This is one of the numerous vicious circles with which Soviet life is surrounded. From a few of these taken at random, one may form a fairly definite opinion of the whole. That is how it was with Vichka. A month later I was attached as interpreter to some foreign delegation on a tour of inspection.

The delegation was very much impressed with the whole concern, but I felt so stupid, and so sick of it all, that I have no desire even to record it.

I looked searchingly at the agronomist. Who knows? Maybe he is just saving his skin with this idiotic 'khaltura'? much as I am doing with my Spartaciad? True, Vichka will cost immensely more than my Spartaciad, but when it comes to saving one's skin, the expense is scarcely worth considering, especially when it is defrayed from someone else's purse.

I even tried to tip him a wink, with a knowing smile and glance, but that made no impression. The man took his cucumbers seriously. And I felt a sense of fear: I do not like enthusiasts. This one will willingly lay down his head for his tomatoes, but he will think even less about my cranium. I tried to hint that on the Dniepr and along the Don and Kuban, tomatoes can be grown by the million ton without electrification, and that there is enough land there to last for centuries, but his owlish eyes blinked the deep disdain of the scientist for the layman, as he fell silent. He gave me an ample supply of cucumbers, nevertheless.

## The Health Resort on the Vichka

It became unnecessary to build barracks for the teams, as I succeeded in appropriating a large new building of the Sovkhoz, just completed and still vacant.

This was one of the last steps in setting the stage for a Spartaciad, in which other people besides sportsmen would participate. I never intended to see it through, and recruited my teams mostly because of personal liking and the principle of protection. Yura and I were in a position to play Haroun-al-Raschid. We could bestow a favour, grant a boon, amid the sordid conditions of Camp life. We could confer a spell of well-fed, care-free life, and we offered it with open hand, since we never meant to remain to pay the piper. We would get into our lounge in the tall grass, and discuss the prospective candidates.

Since we had everything from good quarters to provisions, it would be a pity to leave any berths vacant. So, ostensibly for medical supervision over the precious health of my sportsmen, I secured from the Cheka infirmary an old surgeon, who was on the verge of a collapse from the strain of Camp life, and in return I had an opportunity to recruit my own system through shower-baths, massage, electro-therapy, mountain sun and air, which I dare say would have cost me a pretty penny under European conditions. Very much in the same manner, we requisitioned two typists from the administrative offices of the W.B.C., one of whom had spent seven, and the other six years in Camp. And, generally speaking, people were transferred to Vichka, who had nothing, and could have had nothing to do with the Spartaciad.

All my instructions for such transfers were carried out by Pokkaln without any comment. I believe that during those weeks he became pretty sick and tired of the whole business, and probably saw it in his dreams as an octopus with glasses on each tentacle; and if anyone was glad to see our backs, it was certainly he.

The only rift in the lute was over a professor of geology, a septuagenarian, and somewhat of a celebrity in his line even outside Russia, whom Yura unearthed through Khlebnikov. I decided to take a chance and submitted his name to Pokkaln, but this was too much for even his Latvian stolidity.

„I am sorry, Comrade Solonevich, but that is going too far. What do you want him for? He is much over sixty, and you are not going to tell me that he is going to play football.”

„But, Comrade Pokkain, you can see yourself that the importance of the Spartakiad is not at all sporting but political.”

He was goaded beyond endurance, but had to pretend that the political aspect of the matter was like an open book to him. To ask me for any explanation, would mean an admission of ignorance, not in keeping with his status as a member of the party.

The professor and his scant belongings were packed off to Vichka, sun bathing, and trout fishing.

When he had recovered from his first surprise, he took me aside:

„You seem to know what this is all about. Will you be good enough to explain what this dream means?”

That was out of the question, naturally, but I asked him for a few lessons with the rod, in exchange for giving him a chance to fish. He tried hard for a couple of days, but finally abandoned it in despair.

„You will have to excuse me, but I was never interested in ‘vydvijentsy’ and I never had a pupil as stupid as you. My advice is never to lay your hand on a rod. It is nothing but a profanation of an art.”

Yura, in his capacity as sports instructor of the Medgora department, roamed about the Camps, and looked up suitable prospects for the Vichka resort. He would find, let us say, a book-keeper at the Sixth Camp, and the girl’s eligibility would be seriously considered, with results quite astonishing to her.

From a twelve-hour work day on an empty stomach, from browbeating and bed bugs, she would be lifted to the comfort, security, and ease of a health resort.



I would have given a great deal to have seen how Uspensky wound up the Spartaciad, and Pokkaln the Vichka resort, after we had left. At any rate, it was an exceptionally merry episode in my chequered career.

## On Di[?] Heights

My relations with Uspensky made up in originality what they lost in the human touch. A prisoner and a convict, I was transformed by the magic wand of the administration into a fellow conspirator, a party to a crooked deal. But Uspensky had sufficient courage, or perhaps something else, not to put an honest face on it, and I did not attempt it. This brought about an almost complete understanding between us.

He would send for me at the most irregular hours of day and night, listen to my reports on progress made, order and censor articles for *Re-construction*, for Moscow, and for the affiliated Communist Parties abroad, discuss the continuity of the scenario, and attend to a thousand other details. Once in a while we had differences, and one of them was over the professor of geology.

Uspensky had sent for me, and seemed greatly irritated. „What the devil do you want with that old man?” he began.

„I am going to teach him how to play volley-ball,” I calmly replied.

He swung round to me as if to tell me not to play the fool, but he asked whether I knew what occupation the professor was following at the Production Department, and I said that I knew, of course.

„Well, since you admit that you know what work he is doing and you consider it important, what do you mean by taking him out?”

„Don't you see, Comrade Uspensky? No? I regard Professor X. in the light of an ornament to the entire Spartaciad. . . . Professor X. is a national, and quite probably an international celebrity. I shall teach him to play volleyball which, at his age, is not so very easy. But he has a very patriarchal face, which will photograph very well. We must feed him up and give him plenty of sun tan. His healthy tanned face, his noble features and bearing against the background of our enthusiastic youth, playing volleyball and marching in column, will make a much better display than any young criminal of the splendid appeal of 're-construction'. You realise that all those Urks are unconvincing and hackneyed, while in him you will have a famous man presented from an entirely novel angle.”

Uspensky was so impressed that he took the cigarette out of his mouth.

„I have to hand it to you,” said he slowly, „it is very clever. But, don't you think that he may refuse? I hope that you did not tell him anything about . . . well, about the Spartaciad.”

„Of course I have not. And he will not know till the very last moment that he is going to be photographed and filmed.

„Ssoo . . .” he mused over the 'possibilities' of the Spartaciad which he began to comprehend in all their far-reaching effect. „Verjbitsky, the Production Department Chief, was bothering me about your professor. He wants him back, but of course the man does not understand the political importance of the matter. Only he is much too old, your professor, much too old. We shall have to put him on a special diet.”

So the septuagenarian volley-ball player had found his place under M. Stalin, *Re Rot Soleil* of the bigger and better Bastille, while a geologist with a life-long experience and achievement found nothing but confinement in a Concentration Camp. How is that for apantomime?

## The Aquatic Station

Dynamo boasted an Aquatic Station on the shores of Lake Onega. As in Moscow, in Leningrad, and also in Medgora, the 'Dynamo' Aquatic station was the rallying spot, the port of missing men, for the local leading aristocracy, mostly G.P.U. The prices at the buffet were fixed in accordance with those at the G.P.U. Co-operative, that is, on the assumption that the Soviet rouble is worth about as much as the gold rouble, in other words the prices were nominal, and the comforts, therefore, almost free. There were rowboats, vodka, and beer, and their customary accessories.

Neither free men, nor prisoners could get within a pistol shot of the place. Even the local Party aristocracy, outside the Camp, dropped in but seldom, kept quiet, and looked in awe upon the porcine grandeur of the well-fed Chekists. But, *ex officio*, this exclusive club was under my control.

Will you step into the shoes of the secretary of the Regional Party Committee, the local *marechal de noblesse*, so to speak.

He comes here too—oh, no, not to rub elbows with the high and the mighty—but just to look at them: the G.P.U. barons and baronets, the workers from the Centre, from the Centre of All Things, from Moscow, the responsible workers sent here to instruct, to govern, to shake up—all those Radetskys, Yakimenkos, Korzuns, and others, self-assured, well fed, important. He, the poor wheel-horse, will hesitate between a glass of vodka and a small beer, he with the carnation-red rosette of the Order of Lenin, so faded and unimpressive now, in his lapel; he whose merit was recognised well enough in the past has but a back seat now, he is oppressed by the 'monolith mass' of the Party, by the big-town and Chekist-like assurance and the aristocratically-supercilious manner of some Yakimenko, who looks at him as if he were invisible.

While I, the dregs of the Socialistic commune, so to speak, walk about the station in shorts, as if I own it, and the very same Yakimenko shakes me warmly by the hand, sits on the sand at my side and chats. I teach him to

swim and supply an interesting travelogue. I can talk upon almost any subject under the moon, and I enjoy some 'graft' with Uspensky.

The poor *marechal de noblesse* feels that, in some unaccountable fashion, everyone looks down on him, I, the counterrevolutionary, Yakimenko—the revolutionary, and many other Johnnies-come-lately. But it will be he whom some kulaks will 'liquidate' on a progress from one Karelian village to another, and whose family will be immediately and uncompromisingly dispossessed by the new claimant to his official quarters.

One day I was sunning myself on the wooden pier of the Dynamo Aquatic Station, and reading Longfellow, in an English edition. The genesis of this book is interesting enough in itself to mention it here.

The Administration of the W.B.C. had an excellent library for their exclusive use, and that of the prisoners of the First Camp, the 'specialists'. Its bookshelves are better stocked than those of many large Professional-Union libraries at Moscow. The books did not disappear nor were they periodically censored out of circulation. There were authors there, like Selvinsky, that were obtainable at Moscow only through illicit channels. Besides that, the library was well supplied with foreign technical literature and periodicals, from which one could gather some information on everyday life as well. I had asked the librarian to order from London a set of books by Longfellow. They were ordered and arrived promptly.

If a professor at Moscow wants to order something abroad, he has to disentangle a great deal of red tape with small prospect of success. But here—it was G.P.U., the budget and the foreign exchange was G.P.U., under Uspensky, who would always grant a reasonable request of mine.

That is how I happened to read Longfellow, while Yura was swimming about somewhere, half a mile off shore.

„Reading up your classics?” I heard Uspensky's voice.

He sat down, pulled off his boots, took off the rest of his Red Army garb, and, slapping himself on the flanks, complained:

„The dickens of it is. I am getting thinner.”

I recommended to him a „dead hour” after dinner.

„What do you mean, a dead hour? I am dead most of the time. You read English, I see?” „Yes, I know English.”

„Bourgeooy, that’s what you are,” said he. ‘Bourgeooy’ is an almost accepted slang for bourgeois.

„Every bit of that,” I admitted cheerfully. „Say, isn’t it hot!”

Yura stopped swimming around, and started for the shore in a classical crawl with which he could do a hundred-metre dash in what was a record time for Russia.

Uspensky rose on his elbow.

„Look at that son of a bitch! That’s some swimming! Who is he?” „My son.”

„Is that so? I knew your brother up in the Solovki. What a bear he was !”

Yura made for the shore with a great deal of display, and jumped out on the pier. Water was running off his thick thatch of hair, and besides he was completely blind without glasses. You are swimming in Bolshevik tempos,” complimented Uspensky. Yura squinted upon the unfamiliar naked form.

„Yes, this is my specialty.”

About the speed of the All-Union record,” I proudly enlarged. „Really?”

„You saw for yourself.”

„Do you take part in the Spartaciad?” asked Uspensky of Yura.

„Our crown number,” I replied unguardedly.

„The crown number will be Professor X.,” said Yura, exuberantly. Uspensky looked at me censoriously.

„Yura is absolutely *au courant*. He is my right hand, and at Moscow he worked in the moving pictures as an assistant to the well-known director, Comrade Romm. He is organising the filming of the Spartaciad.”

„Well, well. So, your name is Yura? Let’s get acquainted. My name is Uspensky.” „Glad to meet you,” smiled Yura, „I know you. You are the Chief of the Camp. I have heard a lot about you.”

„You don’t say?” Uspensky played up, ironically.

Yura dried himself, put on his glasses, and sat down quite at his ease.

„You know, very likely, that I go to the Technicum?” „Y-es, I do,” replied Uspensky with equal irony.

„The Technicum is, of course, nothing but ‘khaltura’. Only the Urks go there. They are very romantic people, you know, and they have made up whole ballads about you. Of course, they are not written down. I am collecting them.”

„Ballads, you say? How . . . extraordinary.”

„Yes, ballads, poems, and limericks. Anything you wish.” „Very interesting. And you write them down. Could you read them to me?”

„Yes, I can. Only, I have left them in the barrack.” „What are you living in the barrack for?”

Uspensky turned to me, „I offered to move you into the dormitory of the Armed Guards, didn’t I?”

„I think of moving to Vichka,” I said, evading the unwelcome offer.

„Do you remember any of the poems by heart?” he turned again to Yura, who obliged by a selection from the Urks’ poetry. It was almost impossible to translate it into colloquial Russian, and absolutely impossible to print.

„Gifted people, they are,” admitted Uspensky, „but we shall have to liquidate them all, and it cannot be helped.”

I preferred not to utilise the liquidations as a topic for relaxation.

„You said that you knew my brother at Solovki? Were you in charge there?”

„Just about as much in charge as you are here now.” „You were a prisoner?”  
I was amazed.

„Yes. Sent up for ten years, and, as you see, I am doing very well. You can believe me, that in five years you will make a career, too.”

I was ready to answer, as I had before to Yakimenko, that if a Moscow career had not interested me, a Camp career was out of the question. But I thought better of it.

„Hey, Grishchok!” suddenly yelled Uspensky to one of his bodyguards, who came on the run.

„Iced okroshka, about five portions. Brandy and ice, a litre. Three glasses. Quick.” Okroshka is a summer iced soup with meat, vegetables, kvas, and sour cream.

Formidable, but refreshing.

„I do not drink,” confessed Yura.

„Nor should you. You are a baby still. Want some chocolate?” „I should like it.”

So it came to pass that we were drinking brandy with Uspensky out in the open, naked, in full view of all the Party and Cheka notables. This was unseemly even by Cheka standards, but Uspensky, with his power, was above all that.

He was trying to prove to me that, for a clever man, there is no wider opportunity for a career than in Camp. It was quite simple, he contended. One should have common sense, and stop at nothing. The theme was becoming nauseating.

Oh, by the way. How about your brother? Where is he now?" Quite near here, at Svirlag."

„Clause, paragraphs?" „Same as mine."

What the devil is he doing there? I must get him over here. I can arrange it through G.U.L.A.G. in a jiffy. . . . That's a fine okroshka, isn't it?"

The bodyguard sit under the scorching sun on the sand about thirty paces away, and nobody ventures to approach nearer. The local *marechal de noblesse*, fully dressed in coat and necktie, sips his beer and perspires.

The rosette of the Order of Lenin is red in his lapel. It stands out like a clot of blood, his own or some other's, and, looking at us, he thinks that he has shed it in vain.



# YOUTH IN CAMP

## The Vichka Resort

However fictitious the character of the Spartaciad might be, I was constrained to demonstrate to Uspensky and his disreputable colleagues, its progress and achievements. Therefore, in addition to the people that I transferred to Vichka for reasons unconnected with sport, I engaged some forty youths more or less acquainted with athletics.

I organised two football matches and a competition in light exercises. The football was played fairly well; while there was nothing to be feared concerning the competition. The stop watches were in trusty hands; no one checked the tapes or weighed the discs but myself. As a result, our 'achievements' were considerable, and I could confidently assume to Uspensky: „Now you can see for yourself that I was right. One month's further training, and we shall be ready for the exhibition.”

Uspensky was brimful of praise.

The building at Vichka was occupied with a most heterogeneous company. It seemed like a quaint mixture of a sporting club and a collection of Hollywood extras. The geological expert once met me on the river, and said:

„Listen, if you have taken upon yourself the role of benefactor to Camp humanity, then please play it to the end. Kindly remove me to some other building; here it is beyond my capacity to endure such a racket for twenty-four hours every day.”

Indeed, the revel really went on day and night. As I strolled along, I was full of envy. These young people, just transferred (and for so short a time) from

forced labour on an almost starvation diet, to beefsteaks, while even in Moscow, at liberty, a steak is a rare luxury, and now, to them the world seemed full of pleasure, optimism, courage, and enterprise.

Every race and tribe of Russia was represented. There were Moscovites, Uzbeks, Tartars, Jews, and God alone knows who besides. There was a silent long-distance runner who called himself a Basmach from Afghanistan; there was also a British subject, by origin a Syrian, by nationality a Jew, with an odd surname, Chumburbaba. Of amazing height and strength, he had a voice like the trumpet of Jericho. He had acquired fame by his two attempts to escape from the Solovetsky Islands, and, by his skill at volleyball, where he played single against a team, and usually won. His cheerful stentorian tones resounded all over Vichka, and once I heard (was it possible not to hear?) how he was reviving the spirits of our professor.

„You are a scientist. A scientist has to scan the sky to count the stars. Look at me. I, Chumburbaba, a son of a Syrian huntsman—I am a star!”

The professor evidently ran away. Chumburbaba was chaffed by every member of my ‘children’s colony’, but he cheerfully replied in kind.

All these youths played football, jumped, ran, loafed in the sun, and created a terrible uproar. It became essential to house separately the more sedate section of the company. Even the female book-keepers could not stand such a pace.

For a while Yura and I were inclined to transfer our ‘home’ to Vichka, but in the event of the failure of the ‘khaltura’, our escape from that place might bring harm to the colony afterwards, so we remained at our Camp barrack.

I tried to comprehend this world of Camp youth, so new to me. My analysis certainly showed that Russian youth in Camp completely lack the ‘Soviet enthusiasm’ which they are said to display when at liberty.

I should be inclined to consider my Camp youth as the cream of anti-Soviet youth, were it not that the choicest cream had been dispatched to the other world, or to the Solovetsky Islands. Therefore the attitude of this group is

not that of every Soviet youth, but it is, nevertheless, characteristic of 60 per cent or 70 per cent of the younger Russian generation. Anti-Soviet as this estimate appears, its substantial accuracy seems to me unquestionable.

All these boys had been sentenced under paragraphs ordering chastisement for terrorist conduct, and the sentence of imprisonment was uniform—ten years. In reality, it meant that they would never be restored to liberty. At the expiration of their sentence, they would be exiled to Siberia, or to some other remote region in Russia. As an alternative, there existed also a special procedure, almost unknown abroad, under which it was understood that, having served their term, they were hired as labourers without compulsion. The system operated in this way: you were not allowed to leave the Camp, but you were permitted to live in a private lodging instead of barracks; your monthly wages would not be merely equivalent to the prisoners' remuneration—lumberjack—3.80 roubles, or book-keeper—15-20 roubles per month, but would depend on your profession, and might be as high as three or four hundred roubles (£ 4.5- £ 6) . But you would have to remain in Camp for life.

When once you get into the clutches of the G.P.U., there is little chance of escape; when one is convicted of a terrorist act, there is no hope whatever. And it is easy to fall into official hands; a single anonymous denunciation, and your fate is sealed!

For that reason, the attitude of the Camp youth towards the administration was independent and, I might say, arrogant. In any transaction with a Chief of Column, or Camp commander, the prisoner's face displayed his feelings something like these:

„I don't care what the consequences may be, but in any case, I shall give you a thorough licking first”—the psychology of despair.

The lickings' took place rather frequently, and were very severe. The punishment meted out in such instances was solitary confinement, and occasionally the firing squad. The latter was, however, rather unusual. Most

of the boys were qualified as skilled workmen, and there was a keen demand for their services.

Therefore, the administrative staff of all ranks much preferred to leave the youths severely alone.

I was well aware that a certain Comrade Podmokli had his own secret informers among the boys, but for a long time I could not discover their identity. All my football and other teams were selected by myself;—who, then, was likely to serve as a spy?

As it happened, there was one fellow under sentence for an ‘excess of zeal’. Afterwards, it was disclosed that the ‘excess’ had consisted in the ‘unlawful shooting’ of two arrested men; the fellow had been a village militiaman (policemen). He himself tattled about it, and as a sequel, at the next football match, one of his legs was broken.

Podmokli called me into his office, and asked insistently: Had it been accidental, or a premeditated act?

I told Podmokli that there could not have been any premeditation in the matter; I myself had been coaching the play, and had seen how everything happened. Podmokli looked at me with hostility and suspicion, but that was nothing abnormal, for in the morning he was always in low spirits after a drunken night.

For some time, he repeatedly inquired what kind of people were assembled at Vichka—what they talked about, and what was their political attitude. At last I said:

„Why do you persist in these questions? You have your own stool pigeons, ask them.” „Of course, I have stool pigeons, but I want your confirmation.”

It became clear to me that the fellow with the ‘excess of zeal’ was the sole informer. So quickly had Vichka been organised that the G.P.U. had had no time to infest my organisation with spies.

Moreover, it was not too easy, when I selected the candidates personally.

The conversation assumed quite a diplomatic character. Podmokli, somewhat obscurely, proceeded to, recommend in a roundabout way several remarkable forwards, at present employees of the G.P.U.

I replied that I should have to ascertain what kind of players they were, and if they happened to be really good ones, then I would take them. Podmokli darkly insinuated his desires, until I told him bluntly:

„If you want to have your own people at Vichka, why don't you say so?"

„Why do you pretend to be so naive yourself? Don't you really understand what we are talking about?" retorted Podmokli.

The situation thus created was far from pleasant. To refuse was practically impossible. To accept Podmokli's henchmen without warning my boys was extremely inadvisable. Yet to admit them, precautiously, could only mean one thing. At the first training some of the spies' bones would be broken, as had already happened, and I myself would be held responsible.

I told Podmokli that, personally, I had no objection to urge his nominees, but if they were really not such good players as Podmokli claimed, then my boys would soon discover that sport had nothing to do with their admission. In such circumstances, I couldn't guarantee their safety.

„You are a fine diplomat, you are," said Podmokli with displeasure.

„No wonder—dealing with you, one soon learns to become diplomatic," I answered. Podmokli appeared flattered. He took from his brief-case a bottle of vodka. „I must kill this hangover. Won't you have a drink?"

„No, thank you, I am in training."

Podmokli poured out a full glass, and slowly sipped it. Anyway, we must keep an eye on Vichka, so you'll have to take my fellows. If their legs happen to get broken, to hell with them. We of the G.P.U. do not deplore such casualties."

In this way two convicts, former Trotskyists, were transferred to Vichka. Before their coming, I cautioned Khlebnikov and two or three of the boys not to babble too much in their company.

One of the boys, the terrorist, Khlebnikov, replied bluntly that the boys were not afraid of any informers, and would just spit on them. The same point of view was taken by Korenevski, an obstinate and militant Menshevik. He told me that he would not conceal his opinions before Stalin himself; that history and the awakening of the proletarian masses were working for his ideas, and so forth and so forth. I could only say:

„That is your affair. I've warned you.”

History and the awakened masses failed to help. Korenevski continued his Menshevik agitation, and was banished from Vichka to the Solovetski Islands, but I am not certain that he reached the Islands alive.

Socialist propaganda did not meet with any sympathy among my sportsmen. It was really too absurd to submit any Socialist propaganda to citizens who were subject to nearly 100 per cent Socialism in practice. Even the terrorist Khlebnikov who, alone of all the colony, ventured at times to utter the term ‘Socialism’; even he discontinued its use, after the disastrous sequel to Korenevski's Menshevik propaganda. With Korenevski I myself had quite a row.

Korenevski was a tall lean boy with the traditional long hair of a Russian Nihilist, now a disappearing species of Anarchist Communism. His pedantic speech was adorned with quotations from Socialist publications of pre-war vintage. He quoted, for instance, from the Erfurt Programme, and from Kautsky. He constantly declared that the Bolsheviks usurped power, that they were contaminating Marxism, and that their dictatorship was not a dictatorship of the populace, but a dictatorship over the community.

The boys at Vichka who themselves knew both the Revolution and Socialism from experience, considered Korenevski slightly crazy, and merely giggled at him.

Fomko, a rather serious workman from the Ukraine, by profession a locksmith, once called me aside, and said:

„I just wanted to speak with you about Korenevski. Tell him to shut up. Myself, I am a proletarian, just like any other chap, but I am sick of this same Socialism. With his talking he takes too many chances; he will be lost one of these days. . . . Have a chat with him. You have some authority over him.”

As it happened, I did not possess any ‘authority’. I called on Korenevski to accompany me from Vichka to Medgora. On our way I tried to give him fatherly admonition. As all his talk was openly conducted so that any inquisitive ear could listen, I asked him whether he didn’t realise that there were stool pigeons among the sixty people at Vichka. Was it worth while to incur the risk of being shot for such a hopeless enterprise as the advocacy of Socialism in Soviet Russia, and above all in a Concentration Camp? Life had somehow passed Korenevski by, without teaching him any of its lessons. With nervous gestures he threw back the long hair ever falling over his face, and again and again bombarded me with quotations from Marx and the Erfurt Programme. I told him I was familiar with both and, what was more, I had learned their practical value and later variant readings.

The result was nil. Korenevski was as obstinate as a mule. He told me that he was very grateful for my friendly intentions, but that he put the interests of the proletariat above everything else. By the way, he had nothing in common with the proletariat; his father was a doctor in Moscow; and he himself had chosen quite an unusual profession in Soviet Russia, an astronomer’s.

Two weeks later I was met at Vichka by a very disconcerted Khlebnikov.

„They have taken Korenevski away,” he said. „At least, he has disappeared, and this morning the G.P.U., fetched his belongings.”

„Hm,” I said. „So the play is over, ring down the curtain.”

Khlebnikov looked at me with an expectant glance.

„Let us sit down. We must contrive some scheme.” „What kind of plan can there be?” I angrily inquired. „The fellow had his warning.”

„Yes, I know it. That is, of course, consolatory.” Khlebnikov ironically shrugged his shoulders.

„To be sure. We did caution him. He wouldn't listen. . . . It was his life, damn it, it was such a comfort. . . . Wait a bit, there's somebody coming.”

For a time we remained silent. Some Vichka prisoners went by and gave us envious and unfriendly glances. When compared with their meagre rations, the steaks at Vichka did not encourage sympathy from Camp prisoners. Behind them appeared the tall figure of Fomko with fishing rods in his hands. He approached us:

„Are you aware of what has happened to Korenevski?” „Let us move on a little,” said Khlebnikov.

We moved some steps further, and then sat down.

„Well, Ivan Lukianovich,” said Khlebnikov, „I fully understand that you feel no sympathy with anything concerning Socialism, yet we must try to get the fellow out of this scrape.”

I only shrugged my shoulders; what could possibly be done?

„Could you not sound Podmokli? I believe you know him rather intimately.” Khlebnikov looked at me, not without sarcasm.

„Or perhaps you could ask Uspensky himself?” Khlebnikov and Fomko exchanged understanding glances. For a while we remained silent.

„The boys are greatly excited over the arrest of Korenevski. After all, he was not a bad fellow,” mused Khlebnikov.

„He was all right,” said Fomko softly.

I didn't see any possibility of helping Korenevski. To go to Podmokli—what could I tell him? The Menshevik agitation of Korenevski had been conducted



in such a childish way that everyone was aware of it. The wonder was that he had not been arrested long before.

If I chanced to see Uspensky, I could try to speak to him, that was contingent on his sending for me.

To make a special application would lead to complete failure.

But Khlebnikov continued, staring at me, as if he were penetrating my innermost being, and I could discern in his look a hint that if I permitted myself to drink with Podmokli, then it was my moral duty to do something as recompense for such a decline from dignity.

That same evening at 'Dynamo', I attempted to tell Podmokli the whole story in humorous vein. He looked at me with the cunning eyes of a sot, and merely giggled.

I told him that all this procedure was very foolish. It was too stupidly arranged, the work of a novice. As soon as I had received two of his 'Trotskyists', an arrest immediately followed. Anyone could see through the whole thing.

After some bargaining, we came to an agreement. Podmokli would release Korenevski, but I was to admit one more informer.

„Do you know who he is ?” asked Podmokli with drunken glee. „I don't care at all.”

„Really? Well, it is Professor X.”

I was stunned. Professor X., a world-famous name! He, a secret spy of the G.P.U.! Then my Vichka is a resort no more—it is just a trap. My 'Khaltura' operation seemed to turn into a tragedy; and the main thing was, there was nothing to be done.

But Professor X. was not sent to Vichka, and my attempt to free Korenevski did not succeed.

A fishing crew, while setting their nets at the mouth of the River Vichka at the lake, caught the dead body of one of the 'Trotskyists'. The body was covered with bruises from the rocks in the waterfalls, while around one foot were coils of fishing line.

Everything indicated that he had stumbled while fishing, the waterfalls did the rest. On this occasion Podmokli sent for me officially.

„Now, citizen Solonevich, will you please answer me. . . .”

A row ensued. I had nothing to fear from Podmokli and his minions, for until the completion of my Spartaciad, I was safe from all attacks. So when Podmokli started to shout at me, I told him not to be a fool, or I would go to Uspensky and report to him that informers had been placed at Vichka in the most idiotic manner. I had myself warned him, but he had told me that the G.P.U. does not resent this kind of casualty.

Then I categorically put it to him, not to interfere with my work. It was clear to everyone that no Communist fanatic dwelt at Vichka, and none could be expected there. So, if the Camp G.P.U. began making arrests, I should have to go to Uspensky, and report that he, Podmokli, was endangering the success of the Spartaciad.

„Please, please, don't get so excited. I did not mean anything. Let us have a talk as man to man.”

The exciting incident was closed. There was no further investigation concerning the informer's death. Evidently the G.P.U. had many other casualties. The other 'Trotskyist' was transferred elsewhere.

Korenevski, however, was not released. But I realised that, after the Spartaciad, or to be exact, after my escape, Podmokli would not miss a chance to settle accounts with my boys. Again I felt myself in an impasse, that most idiotic, most terrible impasse of the Soviet regime. Whatever kind of organisation you initiate, be it completely non-partisan and non-political, the G.P.U. will discover a way to undermine it, and make a trap of it.

Bearing this in mind, just before my escape, I sent away several of my boys as instructors, as far as possible from the tentacles of the Medgora G.P.U.

But two or three days before that escape, Podmokli, in a drunken delirium, began promiscuously shooting in the hall of the G.P.U. Office, and disappeared from view. No one, except the higher officials, ever knew what happened to him. Occasionally, there is retribution, for, as a rule, the brutes of the G.P.U. do not live long. They drug the dregs of their conscience in drink, opium, cocaine, and then the merciless machine casts them on the rubbish heap, or into another world. It is probable that death was Podmokli's fate. For a time Vichka was in a state of tense anxiety; with the murder of the „Trotskyist”, everyone anticipated a series of raids, interrogatories, and arrests. On such occasions the G.P.U. will play havoc with selected working parties; the whole population of a barrack, or occasionally an entire working brigade. As a rule, the G.P.U. does not leave unpunished the death of one of its agents. But in this instance the destruction of Vichka would have involved the complete ruin of the Spartaciad, so Uspensky dispensed with his spies and Vichka was left in peace.

Gradually, the tension lessened, and the temporarily subdued sportsmen resumed their customary racket. The political debates were renewed. These were conducted in out-of-the-way corners, and at times some St. Petersburg college student or former 'Komsomolez' from Moscow came to me for information. Thus:

„Does a legal Communist Press really exist in Europe?” „Why don't you obtain a copy of Pravda?

There you will see quotations from the foreign Communist Press; and you will find the number of Communist members of the various parliaments.”

„Well, that may be; but I think that all that really happens is in secret.”

„Is it true that under the old regime in Russia, when a bourgeois entered a street car, a workman was obliged to give him his seat?”

This kind of question was usually asked by the factory Komsomols; the students required information on more complex subjects; such as the world economic crisis. The majority of Russian youth are convinced that abroad there is no economic crisis at all. ... If the Soviet Press says so, it is a lie. Some difficulties arise, of course, and 'our' Press then makes a song of it.

„Was there formerly a constitution in Russia?” Is it true that Trotsky characterised Lenin as ‘A professional exploiter of the backwardness of the Russian working class’?

Is it true that before the Revolution only the nobility were admitted into Russian universities?”

They were intelligent lads, but appallingly ignorant of Russian or other countries' history, and were passing through a period of „sturm und drang”. One alleged Trotskyist was sent here on a charge of gun-running from abroad. The term ‘Trotskyist’ is applied as loosely as ‘Kulak’, ‘White-bandit’, or ‘bureaucrat’. It is as hopeless to try to prove to people that one is not a ‘Trotskyist’, as it would be to prove one's personal decency. In Soviet jurisprudence, the burden of proof rests with the prosecutor, not the defendant.

This ‘Trotskyist’ was the only one who accepted the basic principle of Soviet power. He and Khlebnikov formed the extreme left wing of the Vichka straw parliament, while the majority belonged to that sketchy organisation which styles itself the Union of Russian Youth, the Union of Thinking Youth, or ‘Young Russia’. Outside they foregather near the School and Workers' dormitories, or in the Komsomol cells. Sometimes one is puzzled at Ivan's or Peter's fervent advocacy of the Five-Year Plan at some open meeting, prior to his disappearance. When the smoke clears away, we learn that Ivan or Peter was caught red-handed on night duty typing a most bloodthirsty anti-Soviet hand-bill, and had to walk the last mile alone.

Youth, almost without exception, is indifferent to religion. This is not the official militant atheism, but merely the view that while there are those who need religion, to youth it is unnecessary. In this respect, the atheistic

propaganda of the Bolsheviks was successful but it has not produced any active opposition to theology.

There is no desire for a monarchy. Their ideas concerning old Russia are rather vague, but these were formed apart from the Soviet interpretation of history. While it is useless to discuss religion with the young—they listen patiently but will not express an opinion—it is possible to talk to them about the Czar. „Yes”, they agree, „theoretically it might have been not so bad.”

Their ideas about capitalism are rather undecided. To them, it is now quite evident that one cannot dispense with the capitalist, the private owner-manager; nor can they forget that they have erected factories on the foundation of their own bones. Each group, therefore, has its own recipe for the regulation of capitalism and some of their theories are not devoid of interest. All things considered, Russian youth—deprived of the leadership of the older generation, out of contact with the rest of the world, without access of objective politico-economic literature—inclines to a compromise between State and private ownership. Their outlook is purely technical and economic; indeed, one might say, all for the fleshpots. But they cherish a profound and deep love for their country. This will probably bring about a national re-birth.

Of course the term ‘national’ will probably convey little meaning to the young, or being an ambiguous expression might be misinterpreted as „zoological” nationalism—an artificially stimulated envy and competition among the various racial minorities in Russia.

In passing I must touch upon the very complex problem of nationalism within the Union, i.e. the antagonism of one nationality towards another.

In that vast medley of tribes, tongues, and states of servitude, resulting from the Soviet Revolution, the voice of strife among the young of the national minorities is mute. There is no pitting of Russian against non-Russian, and this has led to an actively surging Russianism of non-Russian youth.

It is interesting to recall that this Russification was first pointed out to me by Yura, when we were exploring the Caucasus on foot. I have checked his observations with my recollections of the past, and noted all evident signs of Russification ever since. It is amazing that so interesting a fact should have escaped my attention. To a young Armenian, the Russian language is a new province, to have and to hold against the older generation, which still entertains a separatist dream of local patriotism. The young Ukrainian, or Turcoman will not give up his Russian, a language he has learned since the Revolution, for any form of local autonomy, because to him Russian provides admission to World Culture, and in present-day Russia they know how to think along international lines.

This compulsory ethnicism: the Ukrainisation, the Yaku-tisation, for instance, the minority movements had some unexpected results. The Ukrainian moujik does not welcome Ukrainisation because he no longer speaks the official learned Ukrainian, and, rightly or wrongly, he feels that when he and his offspring are debarred from Russian, they are permanently destined to remain moujiks. The upward road is open solely to Russian, and to no other language within the Soviet Union. In the Ukraine, at Dnieprostroi, at the Kharkov Tractor Plant, at Krivorozhie, at Kiev, and at Odessa, Russian is spoken. In the mass concentration of labour, the only technically possible *lingua franca* remains Russian.

At Daghestan, in the Caucasus, the national inferiority complexes resolved themselves into eight official State languages, which any patriotic country clerk or railway agent had the right to enforce.

Having obtained the symbol of independence and sovereignty, the tribes rid themselves of some of their complexes and, urged by everyday objective problems, turned to Russian as a convenient means of intercourse. A cement worker, an Ukrainian let us say, who worked yesterday at the Dniepr, may find himself to-morrow a concrete mixer on the Volga superintending young Tartars, and aspire to qualify for the Moscow Technicum. Would a man with his experience listen to the siren call of cultural and, therefore, political and economical separatism? Not likely.

The seat of all the independence movements was the thin substratum of semi-intelligentsia, almost liquidated by Bolshevism. The various political programmes, which approach Russian problems as if dealing with the technique of real-estate sub-division, are of course doomed to failure wherever internal changes in Russian life are involved.

## The Student Chernov

One of the boys at the Vichka resort, Chernov,<sup>15</sup> frequently consulted me concerning the pre-revolutionary standard of living. He was conversant with working conditions under the Soviets at Bobriki, Magnitostroi, as well as the White-Sea Canal. At first as a voluntary worker, he had been animated with Five-Year Plan enthusiasm; but was now a prisoner. He was a fair-complexioned lad of twenty-two or three, of powerful physique. I had an idea that it was he who had thrown the Vichka spy into the stream, but, of course, I asked no questions. During his wanderings, Chernov had acquired an amazing skill in procuring food from the most unlikely places. He could prepare a meal from the soft white core of pine trees and evaporate sweet birch sap. He was also an expert angler. Observing my poor attempts, he offered to teach me. But despite his careful instruction I landed only one or two trout; Chernov caught twenty-eight. We cooked the fish on sticks.

Chernov had been sentenced to ten years; his paragraph denoted terrorism. The Secretary of a Communist cell had been killed as well as an informer. Three of the accused were shot and eight sent to Concentration Camp, but the actual homicide escaped.

„The identity of the homicide remains a mystery,” said Chernov.

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<sup>15</sup> A fictitious name, as are those for all residents of Vichka

I remarked that it would have been better for the guilty to confess, as then one only would have suffered.

„No, we were agreed to avoid any admission. Some of us will, of course, suffer, but the organisation will remain. So soon as we commence to make confessions, everything is lost.”

„What organisation is it?”

„The Union of the Young Generation. There are hardly any others.” „Why, there are many others.”

Chernov shrugged his shoulders. „The others are not worth the powder to blow them to hell. One and a half men in each! The Trotskyists, the Workers’ Opposition. . . . Only half-wits.”

Listen, I will tell you what the younger generation of Russia feels. We must overthrow the whole Soviet system. It is obvious that the Soviets have failed in everything. What is the use of patching and mending? All the Soviets must go to hell, so that not a stick remains. We mentioned the Trotskyists and the Workers’ Opposition, but everyone of them is thinking of one thing only—his own advancement.

Both of these groups possess a Communist Party organisation. The only difference is that a Trotsky will replace a Stalin, some Ivanov succeed the present chairman, Molotov. All these groups are raving about the Communist Party democracy. To hell with such a party, with the Communists! And who are their adherents? Only those who did not gain a position under Stalin and hope for success under a new Trotsky. Mere adventurers! But don’t imagine that even if they do depose Stalin, that they will succeed him. Not a chance! Stalin has been in power too long, his underlings are everywhere. It is not easy to build up an organisation like his, in a moment. Do you imagine he would allow others time enough to organise. Not on your life!”

„What we want,” he proceeded, „is land for the peasant; while the workman needs a free Trade Union. After all, if I am an ordinary lathe hand, I can’t



aspire to directorship of the plant. Who will direct? I don't care a damn, so long as it is not the Party. Even under capitalism, it could be no worse than it is now. Every fool understands that now. When I was in the Ural mining district at Magnitostroi, a party of American workmen arrived, specially selected from the U.S.A. unemployed. My word," Chernov rose on his elbow in agitation, „they had nice suits, portmanteaux, gramophones, wireless sets; they had special food rations and yet, cross my heart, they produced less than we did. If we were given their food rations, we could beat them hollow any day.”

Indeed, even under present conditions in Russia, the average workman produces less than our native labour.

„But,” he went on, „we obtained useful information from them. Now we can judge for ourselves what capitalism can do. We are told that Germany is a country where the people are starving, a country with a glut of manufactured articles. Look at what is going on in our own community! We need a master. Personally I am not against a monarchy, but at present that is immaterial. The essential thing is that every workman, every peasant, should have a shot-gun in some corner of his home. That is what I would consider constitutional. Wait, somebody is coming.”

From behind the bushes emerged two guards. While one stood with his gun in readiness, the other came gloomily towards us. „Your documents please.”

We produced our passes. The guard did not even look at mine. „We know you, all right,” he said (I noted the remark; it would be useful in our escape). They looked casually at Chernov's pass.

„Why the deuce do you ask for our passes?” I said in a tone of friendly banter. „You can see us, two people sitting in broad daylight, cooking fish.”

The guard was irritated. „Don't you know what happens? Someone is sitting, just as you are, and I don't ask for his pass—and he may suddenly say:—Comrade Guard, show me your card, and explain please, why you did not ask for my pass. It means just one month under arrest for me.”

„I see your life is not a happy one,” said Chernov.

„From such a life, one is ready to plunge into hell’s depths,” the guard furiously declared. „All day long spying on each other—Look, I’ve torn my mosquito net on the bushes, but try and get a new one! My face is swollen like a watermelon already.” The guard’s countenance, indeed, suggested dropsy. The second guard laid down his gun and came near our fire.

„Cease chattering, you fool,” he said, „or you will land in the guard-house again.” Don’t I know where to complain, and where not to? These are educated people. May I sit down?”

The guard crawled into the thick of the smoke. „It’s better to get sooty than to be eaten alive by mosquitoes. They are worse than revolution,” he muttered.

The second guard glanced disapprovingly at him, and suspiciously at us.

Chernov smiled sadly, „Suppose that my friend and I should report that such and such patrols were talking counter-revolution?” he inquired.

„I did not talk counter-revolution,” retorted the second guard. „But what he told you about traps does happen, doesn’t it?”

„Yes, it happens,” assented Chernov, „it does, indeed.” „Then to hell with it,” said the first guard.

„With such a life, we shall soon forget how to talk, and will only be able to moo like a cow.” The guard was evidently unhappy; his hands and face were badly bitten by mosquitoes, and he was in a rebellious mood. „Ver-ry nice tramping, dog tired, in the woods like a stupid ram, with a swollen face, and comrades sitting and thinking—there comes a scoundrel, a prison warden . . . ver-ry nice.”

„You are right,” said Chernov.

„Of course I am right. I am spying on you, you are spying on me. That is all we are doing, but the unploughed fields are lying fallow, while there is nobody left to plough. That's the whole story.”

„Why were you transferred to the Concentration Camp?” I asked.

„Because my character was suspected. I was in the Red Army, and I asked my commander how it happened that although we had a State owned by workers, my village was razed and everyone slung out to the devil's mother. Some died of hunger and others were exiled or shot.” I asked, „Comrade Commander, is that the kind of a Workers' State, for which we fought?”

The second guard carefully laid his gun on the ground and looked hard at the surrounding bushes for anyone secreted there. „You had better be quiet. You will talk yourself into trouble again,” he cautioned.

The first guard surveyed him through the swollen slits of his eyes with silent contempt. His cautious companion sat staring at the fire. It seemed that he also was inclined to say something. He stammered, a slight shiver ran through his body. „Why, yes—there is no way—no way at all. . , ”

„Yes, that is so.”

For a time we remained silent. Suddenly a shot resounded in the South, half a mile away, then others. Both guards jumped as though electrified, an evidence of their military drill. The distorted features of the first guard exhibited a cruel smirk. „Someone is trapped. The G.P.U. patrol just passed by, I know. These boys won't mind arresting a runaway, to be sure.”

We heard a shrill whistle, and several more discharges.

„What the devil! Let's run, otherwise we shall be punished for sabotage. So long, Comrades, report us if you like.”

The guards disappeared in the bushes.

„Poor fellow, he could not hold in any longer,” said Chernov. „It happens sometimes. A fellow starts brooding; for a while he keeps silent, and then,

for no reason at all, he explodes. I knew one party orator, who was a pure Communist, always making speeches, denouncing people right and left; but once, at a meeting, he addressed the audience: 'Forgive me, Comrades. All my life I have deceived you, bastard that I am. I was making a career for myself; like a prostitute, I sold myself. . . .' He drew his automatic and began shooting into the presiding board. He killed two of them, wounded one, and, with the last bullet, shot himself in the mouth. He had to explode! By the way, how many do you think there are on our side among these guards? No less than 90 per cent. Remember, I told you so, but you did not believe me."

The firing was resumed, coming closer to the place where we were sitting. We wisely retired to Vichka. Discretion is the better part of valour.

## More of the Mechanics Cabin

All the bustle with the Spartaciad did not diminish our friendship with the mechanics. We felt more or less at home, among these plain men, who lived simply, without ambition.

With them could we relax for an hour or so, and forget that we were in Camp.

One night, on the way back from Vichka, I dropped in for a chat at the cabin. At a home-made workbench, Mukhin was working with a chisel.

„Catching up on the Promfin-plan?" I joked, offering my hand.

Mukhin looked up from the vice, mournful and morose. He wiped his hand on his trousers but did not take mine.

„Sorry, my hand is dirty," he said brusquely.

Somewhat taken aback, I lowered my hand. Mukhin continued his work without a glance, or desire to converse. It was clear, that he did not wish to clasp hands with me. I stood stock still, bewildered by this undeserved slight.

„You are angry with me, or something,” I said lamely. Mukhin went on with his work, but the chisel was slipping.

„What’s the use of being angry?” he said after a while, „and my hand is really oily. And what do you want to shake my hand for; there are other hands to shake, I suppose.” „What other hands?” I could not imagine what he was driving at.

He looked at me heavily.

„You know very well, what hands.”

I understood, and I had nothing to say. I turned and left. Yura was sitting with his back to the barrack wall, his arms clasping his knees, an open book by his side. He was not reading.

„Have you been to the cabin?” he asked. „I have.”

„Well?”

„Have you been to the cabin?” I countered. „I have.”

„Well?”

He shrugged in silence. „They met me as though I were a stool-pigeon, so I had to leave. Lapwing said that you were seen with Podmokli and at Uspensky’s. Do you know, Dad, it is high time to leave.

Can’t we let Boris know somehow?

To hell with all this lousy business. I feel like jumping into the rivet.”

I felt like committing suicide myself. Here was our khaltura come home to roost. But how could I explain to Mukhin that I was not conducting a khaltura for the sake of a Soviet career, like Uspensky, nor to keep him and

other convicts under my heel? How could I show him that if I had wanted a career I could have had one outside the camp? How could I explain without mentioning the word escape? But after my sad experience with Babenko and Mme E., I would not breathe a word to anyone.

„How is Lapwing?”

„Looks lost. I could not talk it over with him in detail, naturally. How could I?” I felt pretty rotten.

About a week later the official registration for the classes at the Technicum opened. Yura was admitted automatically, although there was little for him to do there. Lapwing, after all his expectations, was not admitted, owing to the terror clause in his sentence.

The Technicum was an utterly idiotic undertaking. There were about three hundred registered ‘students’ in the three or four ‘faculties’: road-building, civil engineering and surveying, and something or other besides. Among the faculty were a number of well-known professors from Moscow and Petersburg, all prisoners, of course. The student body was made up of the socially desirable. This term was actually applied to the Urks; they, as criminals, were about the only non-counter-revolutionary element in camp.

The three hundred criminals, recruits from the army of science which was about to conquer the world for Socialism, were illiterate, even after two months’ instruction in such mysteries as reading, spelling, and the multiplication table. They said quite openly that under no circumstances would they learn, or work. Stealing had been good enough for them before Camp, stealing would be good enough when they were set free. ‘It is only an ass who wants to be a cart-horse,’ they summed up the case for the opposition.

Yura was the only exception to the rule. He had been admitted to the preparatory school on Radetsky’s recommendation to the Technicum through Uspensky. There was nothing to gain from the academic course, but among the advantages of being connected with a learned institution were a compass and a map of the region! These were the inducements the

Technicum held for Yura, and with them, when the time came, he was not disappointed.

I taught physical culture and Russian there for a season, but soon gave it up. The Urks did not need Russian; they spoke their own criminal jargon, and physical culture they regarded from a purely practical point of view, expecting to graduate as third-ratespecialists, I suppose.

The Technicum was, of course, a show-place and, at times, a group of foreign tourists would be taken through the building and shown how the reclamation of anti-social elements was conducted. How were tourists to know the truth? Under similar conditions, even I might have been deceived.

To go back to Lapwing, who had blackened the eye of some secretary of a cell in a fight over billeting and had „terror” attached to his sentence. On these grounds he was not admitted to the Technicum, although he knew more than the Urks were required to know, and would certainly have tried to repay in labour the opportunity given him to learn something.

Yura told me that Lapwing, after all his preparation for study, was desperate with disappointment and almost ready to commit suicide. I went to Korzun and, encouraged by his customary civility, put Lapwing's case before him. It seemed that in consequence of the G.U.L.A.G.'s strict instructions, nothing could be done for him. This disconcerted me a great deal, but I suggested that the 'khaltura' and physical culture under Camp restrictions were utterly impossible and that we could not get anywhere by obeying official orders.

„But why you are so bent on this, I can't understand.”

„Don't you see that Klimchenko, alias Lapwing, is about the only man we have who will profit by instruction, and who is likely to apply it later,” I argued.

„Won't your son get anything out of it?” he asked maliciously.

„My son has not long to stay here, and I shall never allow him to work as a road-building foreman.

I shall transfer him to Moscow to the Film-Institute. If your authority is not sufficient to allow Lapwing to join the class, I shall have to go to Uspensky.” Korzun sighed and capitulated, writing out a permit to the principal of the Technicum. Lapwing called on me at the barrack, thanked me confusedly, and vanished. The cabin, of course, interpreted the permit as a crumb from the table of a climber, which did not, however, make me socially acceptable.

When I got back to the barrack that evening I found Akulshin waiting for me. He looked more run-down and dirtier than usual. He had a red, stubby beard, and he was more dejected than I had ever seen him.

„I have been waiting over an hour for you. The Chief of the Third Camp wants you to report to him immediately.”

One look at him was enough to show me that the Chief had not sent for me, and that there was more here than showed on the surface.

„All right,” I said, ‘let’s get along.’

We walked in silence for a while until we were outside the Camp, on the log-strewn banks of Kumsa. Akulshin looked around carefully, and invited me to sit down. We sat down on a log.

„About the Chief, I did not mean it,” he said, explaining the obvious, and hardly knowing how to begin.

„I understand.”

There is something on, with which . . .” he was groping for words, and for his tobacco pouch, to help him out. He offered the pouch, we rolled cigarettes in silence, his strong fingers trembling.

„ . . . I have to turn to you, Comrade Solonevich. I went to Mukhins. He said your Solonevich is like a prostitute. He drinks with Podmokli and visits with



Uspensky. . . - so . . . Akulshin scrutinised me with his heavy, tortured gaze, as if probing the truth in the depths of my being.”

I realised his despair, but resolved to let him rid himself of this false suspicion in his own way.

„So what?” I interjected.

„I said, ‘unlikely’ Mukhin said, ‘What do you mean, unlikely? We saw him with our own eyes’ I said, ‘I told him of my plans; spilled the beans’ He said, ‘a damned fool’ ‘Well, that is as it may be, but on the other hand Solonevich taught me the ropes’ Sereda said, ‘The devil with those people, they find a way round you, and they are hard nuts to crack’ . . . so . . .”

I shrugged, and by my silence helped him to proceed. He took the plunge suddenly, head on, in a stifled, jerky rumble.

„So here I am: to be, or not to be . . . I’ve got to clear off. Looks as if I must go straight away, ‘cause to-morrow they shift us to Tuloma. In the morning.”

„Clear out to the Altai Mountains?”

„To Altai, where my folks are. With the Lord’s help, . . . but I’d better skirt the lake from the north. I cannot get to Povenets, not to speak of Petrozavodsk. If I could only . . .” his voice broke before the effort he still believed desperate, „. . . get a pass to Povenets. Without a pass I cannot get through. If I could only get a little piece of paper for Povenets.”

He finished, spent; and his sober gaze veiled a prayer. I could get such a paper, and he knew or guessed it. He did not seem to realize that I was in just as tight a corner as he thought he was in. Viewed impersonally, the situation was this: if one of us were an informer and the pass changed hands, the other would be done for. But it could not be viewed impersonally, and we had to plumb each other for the truth. When I reviewed this scene later, I recognised the moral strength of one’s right to freedom, and how powerful its claim upon those who so regard it. But I had

no desire to dissimulate. I could have protested my willingness, while regretting my inability to obtain a pass, but I did not. Instead, I tried to master the dilemma. With the Spartaciad's impending importance to the G.P.U., it was not to their interest to send a spy to entrap me now, of all times. If they had anything against me, they would never show their hand before the Spartaciad was completed, and if it proved a great success they would never even play it. It would not be worth while.

As a result of my meditations, I told Akulshin to wait for me while I went to the Administrative Department to write out a one-day assignment for Yura to go to Povenets to deliver sports equipment.

In the morning Yura could say that the pass had been mislaid; and as for the equipment, we should find some means of sending it over.

The pass was issued without demur by the clerks, who had lately been trained to respond to my requests. They also volunteered the information that a batch of several thousand 'free-exiled' peasants was being released north of Povenets, in consequence of which that region was surrounded by a cordon of G.P.U. troops, ostensibly engaged in manoeuvres. I came back to the river bank and found Akulshin much as I had left him, resigned to the unknown fate he had chosen. He seemed terribly downcast, but his courage would perhaps return later.

He took the pass and listened carefully to my instructions. „Have you money for your fare to Povenets?”

„Yes, thanks; but I have no life left. No life, and even if I get to Altai, what can I do there? I'll have to hide like a fox in a hole, till they discover me. . . . It's a hell of a fix. . . . And yet, look round, there is no end to this land of ours, enough and to spare for everybody. . . .”

‘Don't worry about the pass,’ Akulshin resumed, as we smoked our last cigarettes, „in case of any trouble I'll swallow it without chewing. As for you, you too had better clear out.”

„I have nowhere the underbrush and never come out alive.”

„It seems that you, the educated, are sometimes better and sometimes much worse off than we.” He rose. „For to go. It is all right for you to dive into vanish, but what could I do there? I’d your goodness to me, I know God will bless you, Comrade Solonevich.

„Well, just in case, you know, God speed.” He shook hands stoutly, turned, and went off without looking back. He will be free, in one way or another, here or in the hereafter! In a month’s time Yura and I must face the same ordeal.

## Reconciliation

During the month before our escape, events shaped themselves along the conventional lines of a detective story. The murder of the ‘Trotskyist’ in the Vichka River, Akulshin’s escape and its investigation, graft at my health resort brought to light, the first reliable information about Boris, Golman’s underhand activities by which he unsuccessfully sought to compromise me with Uspensky, and many other occurrences, call for a pen more able than mine. In order to have a little recreation, to look round the Camp, I had a trip arranged for me, of which I will speak later. The amenities of a real Concentration Camp, conducted according to the rules of Socialism, were so appalling, and so different from Medgora with its Uspenskys and Korzuns, and their khaltura and graft, that I found it impossible to complete my survey. When I came back I missed the inhabitants of the cabin worse than ever, but I could expect no hospitality there.

But on one of my walking tours to Vichka I met Lenchik hurrying on to some repair work with an armful of tools, and slipped round a convenient corner to avoid an unpleasant encounter.

„Comrade Solonevich,” he called, overtaking me, „why don’t you drop in on us? We have so many things to talk over, do come.”

„What is there that we can talk over?” I inquired.

Lenchik seized my coat with one hand and, while waving his spanner in his other hand, said:

„Now, comrade, don’t take things to heart. We are all lurking here like spiders in a corner. How are we to trust anybody? We thought: all right, a fine man turned up, but look at him, now with Podmokli, then with the rest of the bastards. How in hell are we to know what you wormed yourself in for? We thought you were just one of us, and then we see. . . . Now, that hurts. . . . And you used to talk so fine, then—G.P.U.! Can you beat it? I said to Mukhin, why turn the man down all of a sudden? Perhaps he has reasons, and we do not know what they are. But Mukhin . . . , and then again, one ought to understand that, too. He had a family at Petersburg, and now, just as you suggested, they went to Turkestan; but if, for instance, you are with the G.P.U., what will happen to them? I understand about you, don’t you know, but Mukhin, the thing hit him under the belt, so to speak.”

„Wait, Lenchik. Catch your breath and think. Even if I were with the G.P.U., how could I possibly profit by giving away Mukhin’s family? Now, tell me.”

„That’s what I say. What do you get? Same thing, in the cabin. What good could that do you? But you know how people live now. Like hedgehogs, at the shadow of trouble, shut their eyes and bristle. Can you blame them? Then Akulshin came and said, good-bye, boys, and if they don’t catch me, mark my words, you have hurt the Soloneviches for nothing. Didn’t want to talk to us any more, and left. Then there was a search for him, but he has escaped all right.”

„Are you sure of that?”

„Quite. We asked someone who knows. He is out, never fear.”

Only now I realised that, deep down, I had a superstitious feeling that if Akulshin succeeded, we should, too. Now I felt as if my bonds were broken and a burden removed. There was a bright prospect for the future. I was far away in my thoughts when Lenchik pulled me back by my coat to reality.

„Get your Yura with you and come along. For this special occasion, you know, we have voted two litres, and there will be six of us, what t'hell, we'll have a good time. . . . Will you come?”

„Of course, I will come, and bring a litre, too.”

„Oh, no, you don't. We have already voted. Un-ani-mously.”

„All right, then, Lenchik, I will bring something to eat.” „We will have everything. We'll get into a fine state, drown our sorrows, at least for the time being, on account of the reconciliation.

## The Nationalists

When we arrived Mukhin greeted me solemnly and silently; he shook me by the hand and spoke briefly: „Don't be too hard on me.” Lenchik fussed about the table, Sereda smiled into his moustache, Lapwing and Yura were simply in the seventh heaven.

Sereda viewed my offerings appraisingly: ham, butter, boiled eggs, and six pork chops, well done.

The source of supply was evident.

„They tell us that there is nothing to eat in the Soviet Union, yet we have everything here as good as under the old regime. . . .”

„There you are,” interposed Lapwing, „always harping on the old regime. . . .”

Sereda tried to turn the subject, but threw the fat in the fire by remarking that times were better then.

Lapwing then found and solemnly intoned a speech of Stalin’s that Russia was always in the rear in the „good old time.”

„We are a hundred years behind the capitalist countries,” ran Stalin’s oration, „and stragglers always get the worst of the deal. The Swedes and the Poles have beaten us for being backward. The Tartars and the Turks, the Japs and the Germans have trounced us for being backward. We are a hundred years behind, but we must cover them in ten years, otherwise we shall be smashed. . . .”

Sereda sighed deeply and said: „Quite so. It is no use arguing, we have always been beaten. . . .”

„There you are,” exclaimed Lapwing, „and you say that Stalin is against Russia.”

„He does not go against Russia especially, Sasha; he is for World Revolution, and a few other things. But taking it all in all, in this speech, as in other things, he is simply lying, and that’s all there is about it.”

„What do you mean, Stalin is lying? Didn’t they beat us, always?”

„Of course, they overcame us. The Swedes outclassed us and the Tartars, and . . . what else was there?”

I decided to intervene, make my points, and let them sink into Lapwing’s mind by degrees. But he was obviously puzzled, and glanced at me for guidance.

„All right, Sasha, let us admit that the Swedes and the Tartars really defeated us. And others, also. But how did it come about, then, that Stalin

rules over one-sixth of the solid earth, if in the old days we experienced nothing except disaster? That does not seem reasonable, does it?"

„Somehow that does not sound right," agreed Lenchik. „Take the Tartars now. Where are they? Or the Swedes. This very Camp, they say, is on former Swedish ground. Doesn't that mean that we also have had our victories? And, if so, why doesn't Stalin mention them?"

„Didn't you know, Sasha, that we have taken Paris and Berlin," I inquired.

„That, if you do not mind, Ivan Lukianovich, is nothing but your imagination. About the Tartars you may be right, but about Berlin . . . you must excuse me, I do not believe you."

„We did," calmly confirmed Yura. „I can show it to you in a book to-morrow, and in a Soviet edition, too. You have heard of the conference of William II and Nicholas II at Reval before the war? It seems that William asked the staff-bugler of a regiment on review why the bugle corps had silver bugles? 'For taking Berlin, Your Majesty.' „That,' said William, 'will never happen again.' I cannot know that, your Majesty!"

„Listen," said Lenchik, „let's have one more round and refresh ourselves while you, Comrade Solonevich, outline the past history of old Russia."

„Do you want to listen, or not?" I inquired.

They settled down like roosting chickens and we recounted the story of Russia's achievements. It was a new world to all present save Yura. However dull, and at times sententious, the old classroom history of Illovaisky's may be, it is reliable. The Soviet travesties of history are prejudiced and untrust-worthy. According to the Soviet scribes, pre-Lenin Russia was no better than a cesspool, and its history a calendar of frustration and infamy. All its leading men are depicted as drunkards and imbeciles—a long series of shame and disaster.

Of the cornerstone of Russian annals, the thousand years victorious conflict with the Steppes, neither Lapwing nor Lenchik had ever heard a word.

Of the Hozars, Polovtsy, Pechenegi, and the Tartars who raided and levied tribute on Catherine the Great; of Russia's ultimate overthrow of the greatest military powers and commanders of the world, the Tartars, the Turks, Charles XII of Sweden, and Napoleon; of the feudal princes who ruled under a patent from the Golden Horde; of the colossal empire governed by the Czars and now misgoverned by Stalin—all that expansion and development was previously a terra incognita to my auditors.

They had never even suspected what a mighty country had sired them.

„The deuce, I have read of it, of course, but I never imagined it was like this,” exclaimed Sereda.

„One should know one's job,” ruminated Mukhin, „here they have installed a ruling class and no one can tell heads from tails.”

I disagreed with Mukhin. The present ruling class is expert only in the arts of robbery and exploitation.

„Take Uspensky, for instance. He is an uneducated man,” insisted Mukhin.

„Still, he is extremely clever, and knows his business thoroughly. Otherwise you and I, Comrade Mukhin, would not be here in Camp.”

„The main thing is, where shall we go from here?” lamented Sereda.

„Don't worry. We shall get out somehow,” encouraged Lenchik.

„Our grandchildren, maybe,” said Mukhin, „but we shall not live to see anything.”

„You remember what Alexei Tolstoy wrote of the invasion of Napoleon:

*In dread we look: how far is The bottom of the abyss?*

*But lo[?], we are in Paris!*

*Who would not welcome this!*



*I think we shall manage to get out all right."*

„With the Bolsheviks, nothing good can come," hiccupped Lapwing, „but with us it is different."

I turned to him, amazed at his extraordinary change of front. He was almost intoxicated. His wild hair stood on end, and his eyes flamed. He had forgotten Stalin, and the „beatings" he so triumphantly recited.

„With whom will it be different?" I inquired, recalling the word „we" Khlebnikov had so constantly uttered. I was anxious to probe this mystery.

„All of us, the whole of Russia, I mean. Just think, a hundred and fifty million; if we combine—without the Party, of course, to hell with them, they don't want us, we don't want them. Take me, for instance; I want to learn; they will let all the scum study, but me—no, not me. . . . Or take our Komsomol. We had some bright boys there, and I am not talking about myself. . . . We all piled into the Komsomol in order to study, but how far did we get? To the grain requisitions, no farther. I had a girl there once; they sent her out and . . . but what's the use of talking . . . they brought her back with liver complaint. . . ." Tears rolled down Lapwing's freckled face.

Yura deftly pushed the fourth bottle under the mattress, and I nodded approvingly. Mukhin glanced at Lapwing, then at Yura's strange manipulations, and wanted to play the traditional Russian host by drinking up all there was in the house. But I stepped on his toe, motioned towards Lapwing, and made Mukhin see reason. Lenchik meanwhile approached Lapwing and, shaking his shoulder, tried to console him:

„Eh, cut it out, Sasha. It isn't worth it. What matters if she died? There are plenty of others who died like that and —nichevo! You'll forget it in time."

But Lapwing lifted his tear-stained face and caused another surprise:

„No, I will never forgive them, brother. Anything but that, the bastards. . . . I will never forget that."

## The Variant a on the Vichka

We Russians were so greatly impressed by the scope and suspicious character of the financial operations associated with the construction of the Panama Canal that the term Panama became equivalent to graft.

When I was preparing the food requisitions for my physical culturists, I fully expected Uspensky and Neumeyer to reduce the appropriation, but to my astonishment Uspensky endorsed my plans without a murmur.

„This will not be bad. The boys not only need to be fed, but to be built up,” he said, directing Neumeyer to issue the allowance from the G.P.U. special commissary fund.

The daily rations amounted to 8,000 calories, consisting of meat, butter, milk, eggs, ham, and other edibles. Neumeyer looked this over and only asked to what extent it would be permissible to substitute fish for meat.

„What fish?” I asked.

„Let us say sturgeon.”

Sturgeon, on second thoughts, was all right. Later, I asked myself how it happened that I had not thought of theft and graft; why was I so certain that nothing could be stolen from me? From me, mind you! How could I have forgotten that in Soviet Russia it is impossible to organise anything honestly?

Here thieving began immediately.

The working personnel of my health resort was drawn from the Vichka campers. The chef, for instance, who supervised the beefsteak, ham, and eggs, pork chops, and other delicacies for my wards, needed the will-power of a St. Anthony and the saint's capacity of endurance to enable him to restrict himself to his pound and a half of loathsome bread and a plate or

two of barley. Of course, he devoured beefsteak. So did his scullery boys. And that would have been reasonable, but . . .

Although the Vichka Camp Chief could requisition anything from the stores that the Camp possessed, even he could not purloin what wasn't there.

In order to safeguard Soviet institutions from pillage, every worker was shadowed by Chekists, who themselves stole all they could. The typists in Moscow Chanceries have to take a few sheets of paper at a time from the office to barter them for bread. This, incidentally, is one more explanation why people manage to survive.

There was a man in charge of supplies at Vichka who accumulated a veritable pirate's treasure trove of sugar, butter, ham, sturgeon, and other foods. When once installed, he became subject to general inspection which implied sampling or petty larceny. I wished to put an end to these speculations, but how could I prevent the Camp Chief's friendly visits to my chief of supplies? Unless I incarcerated both nothing could be done.

The physical culturists took turns in policing the kitchen and storehouse, and it never occurred to me that this might lead to trouble. I superintended the kitchen of the First Camp myself, as a representative of the 'civic population', to prevent the issue of food to those not entitled to it. The interpretation of the term 'entitled' was left to me, so that, in the long run, the sheep were all there, but the wolves were fed.

The administration arrived in force and ordered lavishly. If any protest was made, the association of united bosses would gobble me up, despite the protection I possessed. Or, if I succeeded, they would shoot me in secret. No, civic control under a social system of slavery is very precarious, even outside the Camp. I thought that my physical culturists realised that with sufficient clarity.

Yet some silly 'initiative group' sought trouble. They inspected the kitchen and storehouse, discovered a leakage, reported it, and made mischief. The chef and the man in charge of supplies were sent to Shizo, but kept their mouths closed, while the Camp Chief went scot-free.

The leader of this 'initiative group' was my dear Menshevik Korenevski, and this procured his subsequent transfer to the Solovetsky Islands.

They soon found a new chef, but no one to superintend the stores. The Camp Chief, with his wounded gastronomical feelings, washed his hands of the whole business:

„I found a store-keeper for you—a jewel of a man, but you did not like him. It is out of my hands now and you must find another yourself,” he said, virtuously.

But in a few days Fomko, my factotum, found a storekeeper.

„We’ve found a good Jew,” he said, „an old Co-operator. He came out of a 'Trans-Lux' a cripple, but he will make a good storekeeper. You take him.”

## The ‘Trans-Lux’

'The Trans-Lux' is far from a product of my imagination. It is a Soviet abbreviation for the means of forcible extortion. What was needed was gold. The question was where and how to obtain it. 'Trans-Lux' served this purpose.

In their quest for gold the earliest sufferers were the dental mechanics, who were alleged to possess hoards of gold crowns; then followed the dentists, with the gold and platinum fillings; next came the remaining relics of N.E.P.; then physicians, who were suspected of private practice; and last, everyone who earned money. With the rapid depreciation of Soviet paper currency everyone hastened to convert it into necessary articles or commodities of permanent value, or into foreign money.

The policy of plunder was very simple. The dental mechanic Shapiro, let us say, is politely requested to call on the G.P.U. He reports immediately, and is then informed that the G.P.U. unfortunately possesses definite information that he holds gold and currency.

„You are a conscientious citizen of the fatherland of the toilers, and as such you cannot help realising the ambitious aims of the five-year plan, the raising of the classless society, and the other platitudes. . . . Hand over, or else . . . we don't want to hurt you . . . but, of course, if you compel us. . . .

There were a few who did not hand over. They were invited a second time, under guard. They were locked up alternately in the 'steamer' and in the 'cooler' until they either delivered the goods or died.

No one was tortured. Oh, no. Just cells with hot and cold cross ventilation. One is below zero, the other as hot as Sahara. Half a pound of bread, a salt herring, and a glass of water a day. The breathing space of the cells was so arranged that only half the inmates could sit down at any one time; the rest had to stand. But there were no Spanish boots, no drawing nor quartering. The 'treatment', as was once asserted by the Holy Inquisition, was gentle and without the shedding of blood. . . .

I have seen people in Moscow who were courteously invited to call, and who just as politely surrendered their little christening crosses, old fifty-kopek pieces, their wedding rings. I have known people who, having been invited, tried to beg or borrow a hundred or two from their friends in order to buy rings, frequently from the State shops, and turn them over to the G.P.U.

If one did not respond to the first request, one was brought in under guard and often never heard of again.

The system of commandeering precious metals, diamonds, and foreign money from their rightful owners is known as the „Trans-Lux". The brunt of this was borne by the Jewish urban population. The G.P.U. was justified in assuming that when a Jew earns money he won't get drunk with it, or preserve it in paper currency; and that no matter how powerful his

hereditary disinclination to part with it, money may be transmuted by suitable changes in temperature. People in the know have told me that in 1930-34 the Moscow G.P.U. „persuaded” the population to surrender hundreds of thousands of dollars a month.

The Chief of the Camp had secured a room for my office and furnished it with a three-legged table, a bench, and a couple of chairs. On the door he placed a piece of paper which he inscribed, in his best round hand: „The Office of the Chief of the Spartaciad” and, as an afterthought, added: „Do not enter unannounced.” Needless to say, everyone who thought he had business with me walked straight in.

In this unceremonious manner Fomko ushered in an old Jew, my future chief of supplies. We shook hands. Bending his legs with difficulty, he sat down.

„Excuse me, did you ever live in Minsk?” he began. „I remember you very well. And your father, too. You and your brothers were always playing football at Kosharsky Square. I do not expect you to remember me. My name is Dantziger.”

There is nothing like a home-town recollection for mutual questioning. Very soon I gathered that his father had owned a small tannery which employed some fifteen men. It was nationalised. Dantziger himself cleared out to some place on the Ural where he worked in a co-operative until his antecedents were brought to light, and he was discharged. He nearly starved, but eventually found employment in the cottage industry tanning leather. Six months later he and the cottager were incarcerated for „speculation”: buying the hides of fallen cattle. He escaped to Novorossiisk and worked as a longshoreman. At a union ‘purging’—they purged even the longshoremen’s unions—a young komsomol compatriot asserted: „I know him! He is Dantziger, whose father had a huge factory.” Well, that was that. They ‘purged’ him from the union and imprisoned him for „concealing class distinction.”

When the New Economic Policy was gaining a foothold he, in company with some other pariahs, formed an 'Artel', a co-operative group called „The Free Labour” and worked in it for a year. They were all arrested for offering a bribe.

„I would like to know how we could avoid 'offering' a bribe. We had a contract with the Commissariat of War for the delivery of leather belts. We were getting the raw hides from the Leather Trust. If I had not compromised with the Leather Trust, I should have had no leather, and been sentenced for breach of contract with the War Department. If I had bought the raw hides on the 'black' market, I would have been imprisoned for speculation. But if I offered a bribe to the Leather Trust, I must sooner or later be accused of corruption. The wolf, the goat, and the cabbage! I was sick and tired of the whole business; so tired that I did not even attempt to deny anything. I admitted the factory, the father, the jail record at Kurgan and Novorossiisk, and the bribes. 'But tell me, Comrade Investigator, what would you have done in my place?' I asked him, and he said, 'I would have given up the ghost long ago.' And I am ready to give up the ghost now. I cannot go on like this any longer.”

Because he made a clean breast of it, he was sentenced to two years only. When the sentence had expired, he managed to make his way somehow to Leningrad, where a cousin of his happened to be a chief of the Kronstadt militia. This cousin in some way secured a permit for him to live at Leningrad, where he went into the necktie business. That is, he would scavenge for bits of cloth, make the neckties, and sell them on the market. He worked alone and did not venture near a State institution. The trial and error method had taught him wisdom. He corresponded with his family, who had remained behind in the Ural Mountains, and brought over what was left of them. His daughter had died of starvation, his son had become a vagrant „bezprizor-nik”; so that only his wife and son-in-law survived.

The three worked together for about a year and a half and scraped a few pence together. Then the G.P.U. came and said: „If you please . . .” So they pleased. . . . They were being interrogated in detail with a fine flow of

oratory and even a shedding of tears. But that did not aid the inquiry, and they were detained for three days in the 'steamer' and for a further three days in the 'cooler'. From time to time they were taken out into the corridors, where some official harangued them on choice and varied themes relating to civic duty. The civic pride of these unfortunates was appealed to, their duty of self-effacement; their parental love or jealousy. Husbands were asked: „For whom do you think you hoard your gold? For your wife? Now, look at her. You can see now the good time she is enjoying while you are sweating here.” Documentary proof and even 'photographs' taken *in flagrante delicto* were exhibited to the erring 'social' brother. The priests of the new religion were depicting Hell with the same realism, the same degree of truth, as the old. Hallowed Socialism was leading Humanity from the outer darkness of its baser self into the light of the collective Paradise!

Drawing in his head as if fearing a blow, and observing me with terrified looks, Dantziger related the story of the thermostatic appropriation of the gold reserve. (Shades of Hjalmar Schacht and Roosevelt—mere amateurs! Here we requisition gold and its possessor in one simple operation!)

The old man was as powerful as a dray-horse and held out longer than his companions in misfortune. His legs were swollen, the veins were bursting, the bones of his hands were knotted with rheumatism, and then, fortunately, he fainted.

„Well, you know,” sighed Fomko, „to hell with the money. I would have given it up.”

„You would, would you? If they had extracted all my teeth, one by one, I would not have given it up. Do you think that just because I am a Jew I would hold on to money rather than life? I'll have you know that I spit on your money. What is money to me? Something to earn and something to spend, . . . may my . . . money . . . come out in festers on their children's skin. . . . Why have they treated me like a dog for fifteen years? What did my daughter die for, eh? What happened to my son? I do not even know whether he is alive, or not. Do you think I'll let them carry on like that on my money? Not on my life, I won't.”



„So they didn't get it, after all?" inquired Fomko.

„What do you mean, they did not get it? When I did not give it up, they took my wife and my son-in-law. Didn't get it, indeed!"

„Was there much money?"

„What do you mean, much money? I should be ashamed to tell you: two ten-rouble gold pieces, eight dollars, American, and a wedding ring, not mine, but my wife's. . . . " „Do you mean to say that you suffered all that for about fifty roubles gold?" I asked.

„Fifty roubles! You say fifty roubles. What of fifteen years of my life, what of my children. . . . My legs. . . . Can that be lumped into one sum of fifty roubles. Take a look. . . . " The old man rolled up his trouser-leg. His shins were bandaged in dirty rags oozing pus.

„You see that? You shrink back. I—live with it. . . . Because of them. ... If there is a God, never mind what God, a Jewish God or your Christian God, may He dash their children against the rocks, may their children and their children's children fester like my limbs here, let . . . "

The upraised anathematising arms of the Jewish tanner seemed to hurl Jehovah's wrath upon the wicked, his intensity electrified the room and intimidated Fomko, who tried to steal away.

I listened, and reflected how little the curse of millions will avail against a Power which is itself a curse incarnate. . . . The old man, his emotion spent, sobbed, his head upon my desk.

# CLEARANCE TO LIFE

## The Second Bolshevo

The end of June 1934 found me at the pinnacle of my W.B.C. edifice, and I felt perfectly secure.

The Spartaciad had been duly advertised in *Re-construction*; articles sent to the Moscow sports' magazines; the Isvestija, T.A.S.S. (The Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union); and certain instructions issued to the fraternal Communist Parties abroad for an exposition of this sporting achievement. In fine, I felt that although a Soviet success is even more transient than elsewhere, it would need a stroke of exceedingly bad luck to reduce me to the camp's lower levels.

Partly because I was bored to extinction by all this 'khaltura'; partly in response to my journalistic instincts, I decided to explore the camp and ascertain what actually was going on. Officially, my desire for this jaunt was justified. I had to inspect the larger sections of the camp, and to obtain recruits for my Vichka teams. My itinerary embraced Povenets, Vodorazdel (Watershed), Segezha, Kem, and Murmansk.

When Korzun learned that I must pass through Vodorazdel, he asked me to call at the camp colony of the 'bezprizor-niki'—the vagrant children—where he had at one time desired to send me as an instructor. What precisely I was supposed to do there seemed somewhat obscure.

„We have a second Bolshevo there,” said Korzun.

I knew the first Bolshevo very well, and Yura knew it even better since he had revised Gorky's scheme for 'reconstructing' the vagrants. Bolshevo, near

Moscow, is a show place and model colony for vagrant children, or, to be precise, former criminals, which is on the 'must see' list of touring foreigners, but always, however, under the supervision of 'Intourist' agents, so that no one could put awkward questions, nor see what was not intended to be seen. The Bolshevo demonstrated the marvels of Soviet correctional criminology, with their sleight of hand, and impressed the foreign visitors in accordance with their critical or credulous character. Mr. Bernard Shaw, for instance, was uproariously beguiled. In the book of visiting notables, I have seen the names of firebrands so notorious that even the late lamented Markovich might have envied them. There was only one practically-minded American, Professor John Dewey, if I am not mistaken, who asked an impertinent and irreverent question: „What is the advantage of putting the criminals into surroundings which are entirely unattainable by free citizens?”

The system was completely artificial. The 'colonists' were employed in the workshops which manufactured sporting goods for the 'Dynamo', for which they were paid in G.P.U. scrip, roughly equal in purchasing power to the Torgsin rouble. Their earnings fluctuated between 50 and 250 roubles a month, which means that the average earnings of an engineer or doctor were from one-fifth to one-tenth of those of a convicted murderer.

There were comfortable dormitories for the single 'colonists', and separate rooms for the married couples. Yet at liberty they could not command a corner in a room. Yura and I used to philosophize over this: Why try to build up a scientific or a technical career, why write or invent, when it is ever so much simpler to organize a couple of nice remunerative burglaries,—not the annexation of sacred Socialist property, of course,—or two or three murders, strictly non-political, and then repent, 're-construct' according to modern terminology, and then slip into Bolshevo and spend a life of happiness and enjoyment ever after.

The 'colonists' were trained exclusively on the 're-construction' stuff. There are millions of them to choose from, of course, and people do not disappear where life is tolerable.

Moreover, not the least effective argument against an attempted escape is what is euphoniously termed 'discrediting of the institutions',—i.e. shooting at dawn, or at any other convenient time. There is also another reason for remaining, which was somewhat wistfully advanced by one of the house masters of the colony; outside there is nothing left to steal.

This was the first Bolshevo. So it seemed that the second might also be worth a visit, and I said I should be glad to drop in, and glance round.

## Drumming for Physical Culture

I had to take a bus from Medgora to Povenets, and a motor-boat from the latter to Vodorazdel on the celebrated W.B. Canal.

In the bus the passengers were seated according to rank, first the travelling officials of the W.B.C., then other officials of higher standing. The rest could wait. The free population must walk, as they are not allowed to ride in the bus. I was made to realise that for a prisoner a Concentration Camp has roses as well as thorns, and I squeezed myself into the soft leather seat. Outside, under my window, an old woman tearfully beseeched a 'Popka':

„Little soldier, sonny, won't you please find me a seat. As God's in heaven, I have waited here for three days already, and I feel faint. . . . I have no more strength. . . . ” „Why do you want to go anywhere, old woman? Why don't you stay at home where you belong, and pray to God?” inquired the 'Popka'.

„That's all right, old lady, it won't be so long now, it won't . . .”, encouraged another.

„You mean there will be another bus soon?” she asked, hopefully.

„Don't know about another bus,” continues ‘Popka’, „but that death will come for you is evident.”

A collective guffaw from the armed guards greeted this remark, and the bus moved out of the yard. We were rolling along a new but already bumpy highway constructed by prisoners. There is little traffic, nor is there likely to be any, although it is occasionally called a strategic road. It passes Camp sites and their rag-tag inmates, the forcibly collectivised little villages, huts all awry and sadly in need of repair, as well as the deserted homesteads of former owners. A desolate spectacle! So many of the people have been sent to Siberia!

We drove through a ruined estate, Povenets, also silent and forlorn. Soon I shall see the steamers and barges on the canal, the W.B.C. I shall shortly observe the outside world, an animated spectacle of steamers, tugs, and barges, loading and unloading. I leant forward as we rounded a corner to the lock of the canal, and the bus stopped before a barren expanse of water. There were no steamers, no barges there, no glimpse of busy life! A motor-launch, dirty and disconsolate, took aboard two passengers, an engineer, and myself, and moved away on its northward journey.

My collar up against the wind. I still sought adventure in the bows, but the desolate shores of the artificial river, here and there reinforced with cracked concrete, were dismal to a degree. Everything was silent, empty, cold, and dead. The green fronds of pine, the paws, as we call them, stretched down to the water like cavalry vedettes watering horses, behind them. These were at home, calm, self-sufficient and menacing, the swamp-rooted impenetrable forest, veiled like a Tuareg warrior in powder-grey mists. The banks of the canal were deserted. I did not see a single hut, a smoking chimney, or a human creature. Nothing!

Yet barely a year since excavators had crunched and screeched, ammonol (a high explosive) had boomed in mighty subterranean explosions, and a labour army, a hundred thousand strong, had toiled and died, in the swamps, erecting a monument to Stalin. Now its remnants, reinforced to working strength by other prisoners, have travelled on their empty

stomachs to B.A.M., to Siblag, to Dmitlag and other 'lags'; to other swamps, to build more monuments to the same leader, leaving behind the common grave of their companions in misfortune.

How many of these unpitied and unknown martyrs perished here? The W.B.C. old-timers say two hundred thousand; the more honest among the administration admit more than a hundred thousand.

Who were they? God alone knows their names. Who will ever know, at what spot these thousands of tons of human remains were dumped into the Karelian swamps, like those thrown into the Siberian taiga, or the quicksands of the 'Turksib', or the stony erosions of the 'Tchewstroi'?

I recalled the winter nights on the Dnieprostroi, when the numbing wind from the steppes howled through the frost-smitten forests, canyons, and crevasses; when people succumbed where they stood from cold and fatigue, or fell near the ice-incrusted scaffolding; when typhus raged and overworked surgeons endeavoured to devise a plan for mass-amputation of frozen limbs . . . which eventually became the food of famished dogs. But the slavery continued, day and night, without an hour's respite, but with a Press declaration concerning world records in laying concrete. I also remembered the Tchewstroi, a minor project employing some forty thousand men in a Concentration Camp on the River Tchew, in Central Asia. This was the projected irrigation of 360,000 hectares (about 900,000 acres) of land for Indian hemp and rubber-bearing trees.

Yura and I had lost our way in the jungle near the station of Berikey, some 35 miles north of Derbent. This jungle was formerly one great plantation and orchard, but 'de-kulakizing' had converted it into a wilderness. The series of irrigation ditches running down the mountain side had been destroyed, and the ditches themselves became a breeding spot for the malaria mosquito. The lowlands of Daghestan suffered terribly from malaria and the havoc this malaria wrought among the tribesmen is comparable only to that of the Spanish 'flu'. Many tribes on the plains died out completely. But the climatic and other conditions were the same as at the

Tchewstroi. This induced Yura to inquire: „What is the sense of this Tchewstroi?”

The estimated cost of this scheme was eight hundred million roubles, but to visualise a figure so stupendous I was unable. Nor have I yet met with an answer to the question: what was the purpose of the White Sea-Baltic Canal? And for what good purpose did a hundred thousand people perish? Where is the justification for all these insane projects?

Subsequently, I asked those who lived near the canal, whether anything is transported on it, but the reply was always in the negative. In the spring, at the flood, a few torpedo-boats with dismantled artillery and engines had been towed north. But that was all. Later still I asked the engineers at the Board of Canal Construction whether they knew its purpose. I always received the nebulous answer: ‘It was so ordered from above.’

„Was it done simply to establish a record, or to build a monument?”

„Are you not accustomed to that by now?” demanded one of the heroes of the project, a former ‘wrecker’.

No, I am not accustomed to that, and by God, I never shall be.

Out of the mournful depths of the forest, the sunset breeze carried a penetrating, dank, swampy moisture, a dreary drizzle, as purposeless and as insistent as a gnat. The world was cold, devoid of will, dead but unburied!

We were approaching the ‘Second’ Bolshevo.

## The Devils Pile

Some three hundred metres east of and parallel with the canal there is a low ridge of mixed stone, boulders, and granite, carved into sharp facets or

smoothed by glacial action. This sand-sprinkled pile appears like a Cyclopean causeway. To the left of the ridge facing north is a small swamp with a narrow plank crossing over it to the pier on the canal, and across its narrow strip is another ridge and swamp. To the right of the ridge there is an extensive swamp under a ghostly shroud of Karelian fog, which seemed to have absorbed the souls of the departed canal-builders.

The top of the ridge was surmounted by scraggy pine-trees, whose naked roots clung to the stone and sand, while amid these stood some twenty rough-hewn barracks, carefully cradled in the rocks, and surrounded by a strong barbed-wire fence. This is the second Bolshevo, or, to give it its official title, 'the First Children's Labour Colony of the W.B.C.'

The rain persisted, and my feet slipped on the wet boulders. Any minute one might fall and break one's neck on these stones. I walked like a goat, and wished I could kick the idiot who conceived the idea of planting some four thousand children, aged ten to seventeen, in the midst of this Godforsaken swamp. Even leaving out the remainder of the one-sixth of the earth's surface, which is so very completely under the thumb of the Kremlin, there is plenty of land under the W.B.C. to provide a healthier site, if preservation, in place of 'liquidation', had been the objective.

Wind and rain raged round the barracks and the pines sobbed like tall masts, as if they were doomed to sustain the weight of the leaden sky. I was half-frozen in my leather windbreaker at the end of the month of June.

The yard of the colony is crossed by gravel paths, and the ground littered with broken stones, wet and slippery. This is the 'liquidation of vagrancy' in its new aspect. . . . Quite so. . . . The 'bezprizorniki' will certainly be liquidated . . . 'liquidated as a class',

*„ . . . . and none dear nor near ever will know,  
Where I am lying, under the snow . . . . ”*

Nor will anyone presumably care.



## The Bosses

I inquired for the Chief of the Colony, and learned to my dismay that he was none other than Comrade Wiedemann, transferred to this place after the liquidation of Podporozhie. I had always tried, and usually succeeded, in avoiding him, for he belonged to the company of new Soviet careerists, and was experiencing a novel ecstasy of creation. Such administrative enthusiasm, under Camp conditions, is not unlike the cannon which in the story by Victor Hugo slipped its moorings in the storm and moved madly about the deck.

Wiedemann would not only nip one in the calf, as, for instance, Starodubtsev would have done, but he would get you by the throat, much as Yakimenko or Uspensky might have done. But what he failed to understand was the truth that unnecessary violence is unworthy of indulgence. The sense of power was still comparatively new to him, and the sensation of another's throat firmly gripped still fascinated him. Possibly, however, he merely desired to keep his hand in.

This preamble may appear superfluous, but, to admit the truth, I did not relish the prospect of meeting him, and I could have kicked myself for not having inquired more carefully as to details. At least in theory, I was safe, as Uspensky would not favour him if I came to harm. Yet, with all these complexities, there was still a 'but'. . . . Wiedemann had not the faintest conception of my business relationship, and fairly friendly standing with Uspensky. Still, if I were to tell him that we were intimate, and took sun-baths and drank brandy together on the sea shore, he would very probably consider me a liar. Moreover, Medgora was far away, and Wiedemann supreme in his own bailiwick, a feudal lord, complete with dungeon and thumb-screws. I thought of my projected escape in less than a month's time, and did not appreciate my position in the least.

Of course, there was no occasion, and no profit to be gained in taking me by the throat, but there remained the rub: Wiedemann and his tribe need no

reason, no profit, because they already possess everything in the way of material comfort that the system can provide to its operators.

At Podporozhie Wiedemann used to scatter his staff to the B.A.M., to the 'Shizo', to the Rotten River, and I was compelled to give him a wide berth to preclude trouble. Complications were not always easy to forecast, and for my only encounter with him, I had to thank Nadejda Constantinovna.

Wiedemann in some official communication wrote the word 'predgovorenje' which has no existence in Russian, and its structure suggested German, or some other related language, perhaps his mother tongue.

He was apparently in a leonine after-dinner mood, because Nadejda Constantinovna had foolishly entered into a linguistic discussion with him, and was trying to prove that there is no such word in Russian.

Wiedemann had to save the face of authority, even if he had to coin a word for the purpose, but Nadejda, completely misled by his purring and the 'off the record' atmosphere, foolishly suggested referring the matter to a specialist, a literary chap in the front office, and then called me in. By the time I opened the door into the inner sanctum, Wiedemann's purring had been replaced by a roar :

„So you do not think there is such a word as 'predgovorenje' in Russian?"

„I don't," I said unguardedly.

„But I say there is," shouted Wiedemann. „And you mean to call yourself a writer. Go to hell out of here. They don't send writers here for nothing . . . you. . . ." The brief interview terminated in terms unlike those of endearment.

What with Wiedemann, linguistics, the Russian language, and the rest of the combustible debating matter, I had better leave well alone! I thought, God preserve me from such discussions.

However it seemed as though I should have to join issue with Wiedemann. On the one hand, I had only one more month to linger in this Soviet vale of

tears, so why the dickens should I enter a controversy which might detain me here for years! On the other hand, how could I reconcile my conscience with that congenital intelligentsian ego of mine, if I left behind me in this Black Hole of Calcutta, four thousand children buried alive? They are merely kids! True, they are thieves, alcoholics, professional criminals in the making, and yet, they are simply children. Are they to blame if their fathers, too initiated with each other and the sorry scheme of things to compose their differences, inflamed the fuse of Revolution in ignorance of its direful sequel? Are they to blame if their fathers, no matter in what camp bigotry, propinquity, and cynicism had placed them, decided to take the short-cut of cold unholy hate, and despatch to the wall and the firing squad all those who differed from them in opinion? Are they to be condemned when they demand bread even if their fathers neglected to sow the corn. Or, that in inheriting the moral weakness of their fathers, they knew no other path save that of crime?

Are they responsible for the fact that the Revolution caused their fathers to be shot, their mothers to starve to death, and themselves to be thrown on the streets like millions of their brothers and sisters, to starve, or, join the thieves?

Might not the same fate have overtaken my Yura? Was he not spared this doom by that 'Spiegel', that stroke of good luck, which set us free from the Odessa Cheka? Are the children to blame for the fact that the Party decided on the collectivisation of the villages, and were in such a haste to achieve it, that there was no time for individual adjustments? Were they involved in the Party's assertion that child vagrancy had been abolished, in order to save its social face, making every unrescued vagrant a criminal, or a candidate for the office? As a matter of fact, the vagrants, no matter how many times they were 'liquidated' during the eighteen years of Soviet rule, were still an eye-sore, and were consequently removed from the beaten path of tourists? The North was as good a refuge as any. The swamps, scurvy, and tuberculosis do not mind whose dirty work they have to do!

I pictured this scene in winter: the slate grey blanket of the polar night, the white covering of snow on the barracks, and the complete obliteration of the natural, the familiar, and the accountable. Underneath there was life, to be sure; shapes moved, huddled, and there was warmth; the life and warmth of a dung-heap in winter.

I shivered. Here the 'bezprizornik', the vagrant, will be liquidated, completely uprooted. Shades of Bernard Shaw and Dr. Margaret Sanger, you have composed brave music around your own home fires concerning mankind, and the ways and means of improving its numbers and character!

You have uttered gentle sentiments, however passionate, to your own people, but in the dark arcana of the Russian soul, they have awakened resounding echoes: we measure Man's qualities in negative units now, and we possess both pre- and post-birth control.

I am afraid I am indignant, but it remains to discuss the colony with Comrade Wiedemann.

## Pastoral

Wiedemann, it appeared, did not reside there! The climate was too trying for him, and he had decided to remove his residence to a distance. So much the better, I should have time to prepare for the interview, and have a meal.

The rain had ceased, and I went out to meditate among the slippery boulders. Knots of children were assembled round an immense cigarette of composed 'makhorka' and newspaper, much like the Indians over the pipe of peace, alternately smoking. The bread ration was minute, but a little 'makhorka' was provided. Other children were engaged in a curious card-game in which coins and pebbles changed hands repeatedly. Later I ascertained, that what I had witnessed represented the local food exchange:

the children were gambling for rations, the 'ptiushka' of their local Urk' slang.

The youngsters were barefoot, though not altogether ragged, and fairly well washed. One is so accustomed to seeing the homely accumulation of grease, soot, and dirt disfigure the face' of the typical vagrant, that one fails to consider its real character. Now, when cleansed with soap and water, one is appalled by its hardened precocity, and its evidences of varied sexual perversion—all the vile and pollution of the city's underworld!

The waifs had heard of the arrival of the new physical instructor, and flocked towards me, some with cringing smiles, others rudely imperious. Hoarse, if youthful, voices assailed me with inquiries; practised hands went through my pockets with an artistic dexterity which I appreciated as soon as I became conscious that I was sans tobacco pouch, sans matches, and sans handkerchief. Where had they learnt the tricks of the trade, if they were of the class 1929-31, so to say, or as recent as this year? Although the 'bezprizornik' is officially abrogated, he still requires to be rounded up. The source of supply is illimitable.

A detachment of children's 'Vokhr' (their own police), and a couple of supervisors, carried by his head and feet the securely trussed body of a 'patsan', a boys' ring-leader. He screamed as if they were butchering him, but the sight was so familiar that no one turned his head. It was only another victim for the 'Shizo'.

My Headquarters consisted of a large room in a log cabin, crowded with children gathered round the stove and in the corners, smoking 'makhorka', hunting lice phlegmatically, or, merely making a noise.

Obscenity reigned everywhere.

Comrade Poludov, the quondam chief of the Podporozhie Cultural-Educational Section stood at his desk. He was holding a summary court, trying to convict a few out of the ten suspects who confronted him, under guard of the children's 'Vokhr'. The charge was that of manufacturing a deck of playing cards out of paper torn from library books. The suspects were

swearing their heads away in denial, ably seconded by their numerous supporters in court. Poludov seemed bewildered by 'makhorka' smoke, noise, sleepless nights, and the utter futility of the proceedings.

He acted as Wiedemann's assistant, and all I needed from him was a pass for dinner in a 'free' dining-room. I left the room, followed on the way out, by eyes that were not less searching than their hands. They noticed that my pockets were empty.

## An Idealist

The club provided me a lodging for the night. It was a big wooden building containing a large hall, library, and half a dozen rooms, all entirely vacant. The 'zavklub', the man in charge, a tall lanky fellow of about twenty-five years age greeted me like a long-lost brother.

„Thank Heaven, old man, that you are here at last. At least you will give the children something to do. We have no workshop, no school, no text-books—nothing whatever. There is not even a kindergarten book in the library. They have no place to play. There is nothing but stones and swamps about here, and the 'Vokhr' does not allow them to visit the forest. Do you know that children are worse off here than outside? Think of it, four thousand kids thrust into this hole with nothing to do.”

But I had to disillusion the eager 'zavklub'. I was there only in passing for a day or two, merely to study conditions, and to see what could be done. The 'zavklub' seized me by the buttonhole:

„But listen, you are of the Intelligentsia. . . .”

I knew beforehand how a tirade beginning with a reference to the Intelligentsia, would end. The reasoning is always the same. Since I am of

the Intelligentsia, I must sacrifice my health, my nerves, and if necessary even my skin, to cover the gaps in the Soviet scheme of things. Since I am one of the Intelligentsia, my primary profession is imagined to be that of a martyr; I am supposed to maroon myself in a swampy hole, and offer my person as a patch for the rents made by the 'overbending', or over-doing of the collectivisation of the village, the resultant vagrancy, and its so-called liquidation. I was to patch and not to remedy the evil.

I know the self-sacrificing type too well. It is he, the 'zavklub', or a geologist, botanist, folklorist, ichthyologist, or what not, who spreads himself over the fair face of Russia like a thin film of oil on troubled waters, and offers his services to humanity.

He, the martyr, proffers himself as an oblation on the altar of science. Consumption, scurvy, tuberculosis, and malaria complete what starvation began, but he and hundreds of thousands like him, continue to weave the gossamer net of culture, torn only too frequently by the varying Soviet gales. No matter how correct their conclusions scientifically, a Concentration Camp, a prison, and a shooting squad will be their reward for the slightest deviation from the political interpretation of Party discipline. Yet, ant-like, they continue construction and reconstruction.

I have met this type before, in the mountain pastures of Pamir, where they conduct experiments with the merino sheep; in the malaria-ridden holes of Daghestan, where they strive to extract iodine from the Caspian seaweed; in the gorges of Svanetia, where they endeavour to emancipate the women; in the Ukrainian kolkhozes, where they try to acclimatise topinambur, and in the research laboratories of the C.A.G.I. (Central Institute of State Aviation), where they study the streamlining of aerial bombs.

But the merino sheep perish before they learn to break through the snow for pasture; the emancipated Svanetian woman remains just as susceptible to famine; the topinambur refuses to flourish on soil too poverty-stricken for the hardy potato; and the beautifully streamlined air bombs destroy whole villages of reluctant peasants, peasants conveniently dubbed 'kulaks' simply because they oppose collectivisation.

Their children join the ranks of the vagrant 'bezprizorniki' to land eventually in a Concentration Camp, just as conveniently dubbed a 'labour colony'. This completes the first cycle of the Russian cock-and-bull story.

But if of calumny, as the French say, *il restera toujours quelque chose*, the blood of the righteous is never shed quite in vain. And the awareness of all this disconcerts me. I know that my hide is not large enough to provide a patch, even my share of the holes torn by the wild red Soviet bull; I know that there are not sufficient pelts to go round while the bull remains at large. I know that the 'zavklub', the research worker, the peasant, and even I myself, lead even less than a forlorn hope; that we must fail; that the Soviet swamp will close over us, and all our labour. Yet we have to persevere, because we were trained to endurance, and to toil not for the remuneration or reward, but for that equilibrium we have to establish within ourselves.

The poor 'zavklub' is a freeman. At least, he is not a prisoner. He is half devoured by scurvy, yet he asks: „how can I leave? How can I abandon the work before I find a substitute? And how can I find a substitute?” But even for a freeman to relinquish his task is not a simple matter. He surrenders his passport on entering the service of the Camp, and the very receipt for it is authority enough to detain him there, for it does not permit him to leave Camp. But I was aware that it was not the paper alone that kept him there. He knew that he, at least, was doing his level best to restore the children to humanity.

Much as I may pity myself for my weakness, and determined as is my desire to escape from here as soon as possible, I promise the 'zavklub' that I will remain a week, and see what can be done. I know that nothing can be accomplished without consultation with Comrade Wiedemann concerning the colony as a whole.

„Hey you, scum,” called the 'zavklub' to a couple of children, „run along and get a mattress stuffed for Comrade Instructor, and draw a blanket for him from the supply. Hurry.”

„Uncle, will you then give us some 'makhorka'?” bargained the kids.



„You bet, he will,” promised the ‘zavklub’ for me, not knowing that my pouch had been stolen.

„Now hurry away.”

„This is my ‘cult-active’,” he explains, „at least they don’t steal the books.”

„Why do they steal the books? What do they want them for?”

„Many things,” he explains. „They use paper for cigarettes, for making playing cards, for counterfeit identification certificates. Why, they even make ‘chervontzy’<sup>16</sup> out of it, he adds, in admiration of their skill, no matter how criminal. „There are remarkably talented boys among them,” he continued. „I am teaching some of them to draw, and will show you their drawings some day. The only handicap is the scarcity of paper.”

„Why don’t you teach them to carve stone?” I interjected ironically, „that would display up-to-date technique.”

But the ‘zavklub’ did not perceive my irony.

„They do chisel on stones, the little devils, but only pornographic stuff. But with all that, there are talented boys among them, there is no doubt of it.”

„What do you think is the rate of survival among these vagrants?”

„That I can’t tell exactly, but about 20 per cent, I should say.”

I doubted the 20 per cent. The ‘scum’ brought the mattress stuffed with straw, and stood by in silent expectation of the promised fee. I shook out some ‘makhorka’ upon a piece of paper held out by one of them.

„What is this?” from the tired ‘zavklub’.

„Uncle, we did not do it, I’ll swear. We found it.”

The ‘zavklub’ unrolled a page freshly torn from a book.

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<sup>16</sup> 10-rouble paper bill

„Just as I thought,” he sighed sadly, „this is from Lenin’s five-volume collection. You ought to be ashamed, children!” He gave a long lecture about tearing up Lenin’s books. One of the youngsters listened attentively, while the other behind his back, rolled a cigarette out of another torn leaf. Finally the ‘zavklub’ waved his hand in despair, and the culprits vanished.

I was put up for the night near the window, in a large, perfectly bare room. Out of the window I could see the swamp, blanketed with curling mist, the leaden strip of the canal, and the forest with further forests beyond. The white Northern night shed its drowsy, opalescent light upon the desolate landscape. I had spread my belongings over and under the mattress, as the ‘zavklub’ suggested, lest they be stolen, and in a few minutes I settled down with a copy of Balzac borrowed from the library. It was fine to be alone, free from the crowded barracks, indulging in *dolce far niente*<sup>17</sup>.

But my peace was soon disturbed, for suddenly there was a heartrending scream, then curses, and an abrupt, uneasy gagged silence. Some time later five or six shots in rapid succession sounded somewhere beyond the canal. Probably the canal guards firing at some fugitive lost in the dark. And quiet again—a long, hanging curtain of silence broken by another agonising scream, and a shot not far away. The last!

Silence!

What could I do with my Balzac?

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<sup>17</sup> Pleasant relaxation in carefree idleness

## The Vagrants' Weekday Reality

A sunny morning is always pleasant, even amidst the sombre surroundings of this so-called 'labour' colony, lost in the swamps and stone ridges, among the gloomy barracks and the pallid faces of the hungry children.

My guide is a young man of some thirty-five years of age with the uncommon name of Chenikal. He is tall, lanky, and displays a wolfish rapidity. He is one of the senior colony supervisors, and had been chief of a guerrilla band, who later became one of the G.P.U. armed corps of militia. He was sent here for 'exceeding authority'. What this meant precisely, I did not ask, but the term is loosely applied to executions conducted by guards without trial, in plain language, murder. Now he is Chief of the Special Police recruited from among the children. Its strength is about 300, specially selected and trained vagrants who act as auxiliaries to the local G.P.U. They are better housed and fed than the rest, and carry as a badge of authority, a red star on their sleeves. They sleuth, organise drag-nets, search, arrest, and assist the Armed Guard in spying, and policing the Camp.

The other children hate them like poison, and in consequence they travel in patrols. A single 'special guard', who ventures abroad alone, will soon find himself with a broken head, or with a knife in his abdomen.

About a fortnight before my visit, one disappeared and was later discovered hanging from a tree. The lynchers were not apprehended. As a unit, Chenikal's detachment loses from five to six boys a month from similar mishaps. He escorted me on a tour of the barracks, crowded, dirty, and verminous. The colony was originally planned for two thousand inmates, but it now domiciles more than four thousand, with the Leningrad G.P.U. still sending reinforcements. Two hundred and fifty were expected that week, and Chenikal scarcely knew how to billet them. The bunks in the barracks had been double-decked some time previously, and a third deck would compel him to close his eyes completely to the means of ventilation.

The 'zavklub' was quite right when he said that the children have nothing to do all day, except gamble. But the only commodities of value are their rations. Having lost the available, they gamble on credit for future delivery, but when two or three weeks' food supply is lost, they run for it.

„Where can they run?” I demanded.

There are, it seems, several ways of escape. One is to swim across the canal and land on the Murmansk Railway tracks, where the railway guards catch some of the runaways. About half of them escape to the south while the remainder perish in the swamps. A few seek freedom in the East, toward Vologda, but of their fate Chenikal knew nothing. At the close of the winter, a group of about thirty tried to escape south over the ice of Onega Lake. A storm severed an ice-floe on which the runaways stood and drove it into the open lake, which is about a hundred and fifty miles long; and the children were stranded for more than a week on the steadily diminishing floe. Eight of them were drowned, one was eaten by his comrades, and the remnant rescued by fishermen.

Chenikal always carried a bag of bicarbonate of soda, because most of the children suffered from heartburn and stomach catarrh. Even the seasoned constitution of a vagrant could not tolerate the W.B.C. cuisine. The bicarb, played an important part in Chenikal's pedagogics: no bicarb, except on good behaviour. The children would crowd about him, make suffering grimaces, and wheedle. The commotion would be punctuated with the choice obscenity of those who were denied their portion. You may see that his private life, even with free bicarbonate in his pocket, was not a bed of roses. On the one hand, he had the administrative enthusiasm of Wiedemann to contend with, placate, and interpret; on the other, he must be on his guard against a knife between his shoulder blades. He had no rest, day or night. There were frequent bloody fights in the barracks, hysterical riots which it was occasionally necessary to suppress by shooting the probable ringleaders.

The outlook was exceedingly black at the end of winter when, in one month, some seven hundred inmates died.

„The rest were frantic and desperate. They surmised that they would perish for certain,” he explained.

„Why didn’t you organise schools and workshops?” I suggested.

„The school project is being planned now.”

„And how long has it remained in the planning stage?” I inquired.

„Ever since the colony was opened two years ago.”

The stench of the barracks, the sight of children sitting on the bunks (there was no floor space, except the passages between the bunks), cracking lice, and the hopelessly matter-of-fact explanations of Chenikal made me sick. How could these leaders, who had seen nothing better and did not have it in them to imagine it, ever improve their surroundings, which fully reflected their darkened minds, to better things?

I soon realised that any attempt to promote physical culture was doomed to ignominious failure.

Every unoccupied area of the barracks, was piled high with stones. This prompted me to wander outside the barbed wire enclosure.

The guard at the gate, three armed guards and three children’s Special Police, were much more exacting than those at the real Bolshevo, and Medgora. My general pass did not satisfy them, and they wanted to send me back to Headquarters to get a special, one time, pass, which I flatly refused to do, on the ground that I was commissioned from the centre, the W.B.C., to visit all Camps and, in any case, to hell with their passes. I walked out of the gate.

„We shall shoot,” they warned me.

„Let me see you try.” They would not shoot me, but it was necessary to accustom them to the idea that I had the right to come and go as I pleased. This was an indispensable precaution, in case I might have to depart without a pass, without as much as a parting glance, or my knapsack.

## The Upbuilding

Outside there was nothing visible but timber, trees, towering and cold; stones and swamps, damp and extensive; but about three miles north, I came upon a small clearing which might be adapted to my purpose if we removed some forty tree stumps, and conducted a little grading. Even if it proved unsuitable for football, we could make it do for something else. With this pleasing discovery, I went back to the Camp. The guard let me pass in respectful silence, and I went in to see Wiedemann.

„So it's you?" Wiedemann greeted me coolly.

He had lost sight of me, and did not know what I was doing, nor in whose good graces I stood. He could not make up his mind whether to roar, or to purr. I reported on the purpose of my call, and entered into a 'discussion', in which I tried to prove that physical culture in Camp was out of the question, since it consisted of nothing but stones.

„We know that without your report. Our infirmary prepares from a hundred to two hundred dressings a day. . . . The kids break their legs and heads on the stones." He snapped.

„It is necessary to move the colony to some other spot. On my return to Medgora I shall raise this question, and I hope, Comrade Wiedemann, that you will support me. You understand, of course, that in this horrible hole and under these climatic conditions. . . ."

But my discussion was pricked like a soap bubble by Wiedemann's next remark.

„We know all that without you. There are definite instructions from G.U.L.A.G. to keep the colony here. There is nothing at all to talk about." And there was not. With Uspensky I could probably think of something, but with G.U.L.A.G. I was helpless.

„Could you tell me what prompted this decision?" I risked a question.

„That is none of your damned business,” was his rejoinder, and I began to feel that the discussion was going against me. There was nothing left but to report on the spot I had located in the wood.

„That is different. We cannot let everybody out of the Camp, but Poludov will pick out a hundred dependable boys, we shall get the shovels, and you can go to it. But, there’s one thing, we have no shovels. We borrowed some once from the South Town, and did not return them; which means that we can’t borrow them again, but you are new here, and may be able to obtain them.”

We parted, and a little later I succeeded in borrowing the shovels from the South Town, one of the Camps of the Vodorazdel Department. The following morning a hundred vagrants were lined up, like Coxey’s army, in the yard. They were besides themselves with the joy of getting out of a rut, even more than in leaving Camp.

The column stood in a circle of other children and, although there was not a yard of ground to separate them, the expression of their faces plainly distinguished the marchers from the others.

„Uncle, take me with you, Comrade Instructor, may I go with you?” intoned the boys without much hope, however.

But I felt that something had gone wrong somewhere with my project. The supervisors were scurrying to and from the Headquarters of the Vokhr and finally the truth came out: the Chief of the Vokhr demanded that one of the supervisors sign for the hundred vagrants out of bounds, making himself personally responsible thereby for bringing back the same number. Nobody wanted to sign. Wiedemann was out of Camp, and there was nobody to give orders. I saw my plans falling through, and the disappointment to the children who would have to go back to barracks.

„Suppose I sign for them?” I suggested.

„All right, but you know that in case of an escape, you will be personally responsible,” I was told.

Somehow it did not seem impressive, and in a minute I signed a long list of names without reading it. The chief gave his dubious blessing:

„Take care, now!’ he said.

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As soon as we began operations, I found that my vagrants were poor manpower. Despite their wolfish endurance of cold and hunger, they lacked stamina. The heavy shovels weighed down their reedy hands, and soon they were out of breath. The work went on spasmodically. Now they would attack a boulder like a shoal of fish, without visible leader or signal, and just as unanimously drop the shovels and lie prostrate in the wet grass.

I did not urge them on. There was plenty of time and they were out of training. One boy suggested that we burn the stumps instead of removing them. The proposal was very tempting, but the risk of firing some thirty stumps at once seemed too great, and we had to compromise on three. When they were going nicely, I sat near one of them.

„Hey, Uncle. Sit on a stump, or you will get your pants wet,” suggested a boy. I did as bidden and got out my ‘makhorka’. If levitation were possible. I am sure the intensity of their stare would have lifted the makhorka right out of my hands. I rolled a cigarette for myself, and passed the package to the nearest boy.

„May I roll one?” he asked in amazement.

„Go ahead.”

„We won’t use it all,” he promised.

„It is quite all right. You may use it all, if you want to. I have some more.”



„The devil you say! All right we will use half of it.” Bits of paper appeared, borrowed, no doubt, from the library, and the children doled out the makhorka with scrupulous care. In a minute smoke was rising peacefully to heaven. The children were silent, and so was I.

„Uncle, listen Uncle, what are we clearing the ground for?”

„Didn’t I tell you in Camp that we were to make a football field?”

„You said that only for the meeting, didn’t you, Uncle?”

What they meant was that I must have been haranguing them in the usual meeting style, and now they wanted me to speak the truth, and tell them what it was that we were really supposed to do. I re-explained the entire project to them, but that did not seem to impress them. They simply refused to believe me.

„You mean to tell me that they will do it just for us?” one inquired.

„We are sent here to die, not to play football,” cried another.

„Of course, we are here simply to perish,” the next agreed.

„We know they send us to clear the ground, but it is the reptiles who will play ball,” remarked the first boy.

„What reptiles?” the term was new to me.

„The bastards,” the little vagrant added an unprintable description which seemed to fit the children’s Special Police. „We shan’t work for the snakes. Let them work themselves. To hell with them,” came hysterical cries.

I tried to convince them that they were the ones who would play ball, but their disbelief was too well grounded in experience for me to upset it in an hour.

„We have heard such things before.”—“You cannot fool us.” „Pull the wool over somebody else’s eyes.”

I felt that it was better to leave the question alone for a while. It was too embarrassing, and brought their antagonism to too narrow a focus.

A peasant does not toil for the 'snakes', the 'reptiles', or the 'vermin'. The workman is equally emphatic concerning them, and here even the outcasts of this new social order, would rather forswear a few hours of freedom, than know that the detested spies would reap the rewards of their labour.

I recalled my sports' parks and their ultimate fate, so sardonically conveyed to me by Radetsky, and I was even somewhat surprised to find that I was well in the second round of the same vicious circle, of a 'specialist' trying to live up to his intellectual ideals. No one requested me to clear the damned field, except another idealist of a 'zavklub', yet here was I planning, encouraging, even promising other security than the sound of sincerity in my voice. I must be completely deranged. Apparently, I was, because I vacillated and viewed the matter from a different angle.

„Isn't it better to dig round here than to remain in Camp?”

My friends were much brighter than I thought.

„That goes without saying. In the barracks we go completely crazy from having nothing to do, especially in the winter, and we reckon, if we could go on building for a whole summer, then we could keep out in the open all that time.”

The vagrants of all the countless Soviet, Socialistic, federated, autonomous and various other republics speak the same language, and are distinguished by the same Odessa drawl; and by their perfection in this lingo, one may estimate to a certain extent the length of time the speakers have belonged to the fraternity.

A few still used their original accent. I asked one of them when he first became a vagrant.

„In the autumn of last year” (1934).

There were five others of similar date in a group of forty and I ascertained that there were about 12 per cent new recruits in less than a year.

A boy of thirteen or fourteen years of age, who graduated last year, was a peasant from Vologda in North-Western European Russia; his father had been in a kolkhoz, where he was charged with stealing kolkhoz potatoes, and for this he received a sentence of ten years. His mother starved to death, and the village was so depopulated by frequent purgings and banishments, that it almost reverted to forest. His younger brother had an affliction of the eyes, and became totally blind in the absence of proper care. The boy accompanied his brother to Leningrad, where his aunt worked in a factory.

„What factory?” I asked.

„I don't know. I supposed there was only one factory.”

He was certain his aunt was named Xenia, but he had no idea of her surname, not that there was one, generally. The capital turned out to be different from all the expectations of a backwoods lad; his brother was lost in the crowd at the railway station; he, himself, was arrested by the G.P.U.

„I'll bet you have stolen, too.” I remarked.

„No, I didn't have time and didn't know how,” he answered.

Now he will soon learn how to steal.

Another boy of twelve or thirteen was the son of a Moscow workman, transferred to Magnitogorsk with his family. The lad was sent out of the car at a station to fetch some hot water, and then boarded the wrong train. Thus began a long and fruitless search from station to station which ended, as it inevitably would, among the vagrants who know at least how to find food and share it. This was the beginning of another phase of life, probably the final one.

Other stories were similar: hunger; the sacred Socialist property; father's or even both parents' exile as a punishment for an attempt to feed their

children with bread, virtually their own, the fruit of their labour, but now proclaimed the property of the kolkhoz, sacred and taboo to the peasant, who husbanded it. The rest, I trust, is clear. For the city children, mostly of a workman's family, vagrancy begins in the lack of domestic supervision and care. Father is busy working or attending compulsory meetings and parades, for twelve to fifteen hours a day, and mother is coerced by a similar schedule, which is arranged in such a manner that when her husband comes home she is out, and vice versa. As the parents get dinner where they work, there is little or no food, and the boy has every incentive to steal, and nothing to deter him from a career of petty larceny. These children band together, and soon the neighbourhood begins to note its losses. The G.P.U. is sent on their trail. The rest is only a little variation of the village theme: the children are in the clutches of the Socialist State, which sympathises little and pardons nothing at all.

Another instance was a Jewish boy, the son of a 'kolkhoz-nik', a by-product of the collectivisation of the joint colonies in the Crimea. This was something I had not previously encountered. Another Jewish boy had experienced an Odyssey in connection with his family's migration to Biro-Bidjan, a Jewish Republic in Siberia, North of the Chinese Eastern Railway.

To sum up my impressions, I discovered in the colony a new Soviet International, the International of Hunger, of Grief, and Squalor, which levelled all social and tribal distinctions.

A Georgian, badly smitten by tuberculosis and who coughed incessantly, assured me that he was the son of a doctor, executed by the G.P.U.

„Can you speak Georgian?” I asked.

„No, I have forgotten it already.”

How do you like that for Russification, the Russification of youth disposed to depart into another world?

Our talk was as desultory and spasmodic as the work we were trying to perform. The children either chattered suddenly, or fell immediately silent.

They reminded me vividly of a shoal of fish, over which an invisible and inaudible leader was in command. In the voices and in the fleeting moods that swayed this vagrant crowd, there was ever something hysterical. I do not recollect why I asked one of the boys about his parents, but I was struck by the coarseness of his reply.

„They fell like curs, and the deuce with them. I'll get along just as well without them.”

He was a lad of fifteen or sixteen, with an obstinate brow and dark, brooding eyes.

„Is that so?” I asked.

„What in hell do I need parents for? I am managing all right without them.”

„You think you live very well, do you?”

He eyes me venomously. „I live as I please.”

„You are sure of that, are you?”

The boy swore expertly and putridly.

„If you had them with you, you would eat the ‘borshch’ your mother prepared for you, instead of Camp swill. You would have gone to school and played football. And lice would not infest you.”

„Will you go to Hell.” He did not end there, a whole volume of obscenity, rose to his lips. Then he moved away, hitching up his falling trousers with an air of bravado. A few paces further and he turned, spat in my direction, and cursed again, his eyes flashing hatred. . . .

Later, as I travelled north of the colony, I recalled the boy with his depraved tongue and detestation, and I thought of his psychology, so inevitably conditioned by his environment. It was not an isolated mischance that deprived the boy of his parents, but society itself; that society which lacked the machinery, the social service capable of preserving the children when it

robbed them of their parents. As it was, the boy had faced the alternative of starvation or stealing—a moral conflict in its most elementary form.

Here is another typical incident, which happened in 1925 or 1926 at a bazaar in Odessa. A vagrant boy snatched a loaf of bread from a woman's hands and took to his heels. The woman raised a hue and cry; the boy was tripped, fell bruised and bleeding on the cobble-stones, and was kicked in the spine and ribs by the woman who had joined the chase. Some student in the crowd ultimately felled the woman with a heavy blow on her face. But this is not all. Prone on the ground, bleeding and beaten, smarting under his injuries, and protecting himself as well as he could, the boy continued to tear the loaf with hungry teeth, and simply bolted the dirty and blood-stained chunks of bread. He finished the loaf on the way to the police station to which he was eventually taken.

One could scarcely expect these children to lie down, fold their arms on their breasts, and pass from this vale of tears with peaceful resignation for the brighter glory of future Socialist generations. It is but natural that they fought for life with the only weapon they could command, theft. But unfortunately, they deprived people of their last ration of bread, since few had more than one portion.

In the universal penury of Soviet life, millions suffered from a scourge, a widespread social calamity.

The common people were penalised by every stratum of Soviet society, official and unofficial alike.

They were outlawed and hunted down like wolves.

In the outside world there were innumerable children left, children with parents and homes, and a little of the care that a home implies: a measure of nourishment and security. In the colony they were lost for ever, these ten-year-olds who were outlawed! It was only natural that they displayed herd-psychology, if only in self-defence. The hateful demeanour of that one boy is thus explained: 'Can you restore my parents, and return my home to me?

The borshch, the school, and the football you tantalised me with? You can't? Then remain silent, and don't insult me with a sermon!

The boy joined a group gathered round another fire. Silence reigned at ours, till someone volunteered to sing. „Why don't you?" One of the boys jumped up in sprightly fashion, pulled a kind of home-made castanet out of his pocket, and, twitching and ducking, started a racy song:

*Why did we fight and suffer  
And bleed amid the dust?  
Was it for painted kisses  
Or knees of shameless misses  
Or cursed filthy lust?  
„Marukha, please to change your tricks,  
They's compromising me."  
Her deep bass voice at once replied,  
„Go to your masses, go and hide,  
Your club's no place for me."*

The rollicking verses failed to revive the spirits of the party. „Hey, chuck it, will you?" The singer swore and sat down. We were silent again, till a thin voice started a plaintive tune.

*There goes the whistle! Get under on the rods  
The train is starting, and we'll ride like gods,  
All over the world on wheels, or on foot we'll roam . . .  
Neglected vagrant children without any home. . . .*

This song was taken up by a score of muffled voices. The children sang in whatever position the song found them while gazing dully and despondently at the fire, as if peering into their own uncertain future.

*I'm nothing but an orphan stray,  
Whom folks have left and cast away.  
I've been so since my earliest day.  
No luck has ever come my way.*

*I'm nothing but an orphan stray.  
The time will come when I shall die  
And they'll just leave me where I lie  
And none shall know the place save I.*

The reference to the grave is correct. Nobody will ever know where these waifs are buried. Softly sounds the heartrending air, and the children are quite absorbed in contemplating their journey's end, which is, however, very near here, in the swamps, on the railroad ties, or in the scurvy camp, common graves in the colony; or against the wall in the cellars of the W.B.C.'s G.P.U.

„The bastards are here,” suddenly shouts one of the boys.

Headed by Chenikal, some twenty 'special guards' were approaching us, the song died out, and was replaced by: „You scorpions, vermin, you sons of bitches!”

The guards deployed around the clearing and sat down. Chenikal joined me, and the children slowly dispersed.

„Better dig than sit with the vipers.”

„Let them dig themselves. Why should we break our backs for them, while they sit and look? Let the scum dig a grave for themselves.”

Chenikal and I remained alone, and he winked as if to say: „You can see for yourself, what we have to deal with.” I could see it better than he.

„Why did you bring your party?” I asked.

„So that your party would not run away,” he explained.

„You should have thought of that before. We have been here three hours already.” But Chenikal only shrugged his shoulders: „You know how all that happened.”

At dinner-time I ordered the children to fall in, and we started homeward. The column was convoyed by the 'special guards', armed with clubs. I was



walking along beside the column. A boy brushed suspiciously against me, but I knew that my outside pockets were empty, and smiled at him satirically, 'You are too late, my lad.' But he smiled back just as meaningfully, and fell back. The column roared with laughter, in which I joined uncertainly.

„Hey, Uncle, feel your pocket,” they shouted.

I put my hand there and the laughter increased. To my astonishment I found my pouch, filled with makhorka. Well, what do you think of that? The makhorka they had taken yesterday, had certainly been divided among them and consumed, so they must have collected this later, but where and when? The column made merry over the trick it had played me.

„Uncle-Instructor's makhorka got resurrected. Didn't we tell you to look out? Well, next time, Uncle, don't be a sap!”

„Why did you do that?” I sheepishly inquired.

The lad smiled saucily, baring his damaged teeth.

„We passed a resolution at the meeting, just as the grownups do,” he explained.

I remembered the lynched 'special' guard, and thought that the adults' meetings apparently exercise some influence on the children.

Suddenly there were shouts and swearing at the rear of the column, to which Chenikal responded with his wolfish run, and a hurried command: „Column, halt!”

I followed him to the rear. Sitting on a stone by the wayside, was one of the 'special' guards, crying and wiping blood from his wounded head.

„Somebody crowned him with a stone,” explained Chenikal, his eyes searching the faces of the children for the culprit. The vagrants responded derisively:

„I did it, Comrade, I did it. Look me in the eye, look me in the backside.”

It was evidently impossible to identify the stone thrower. The injured guard was assisted by a couple of his companions, whose faces were full of fierce resentment.

Isn't it well arranged: *divide et impera*. These 'special' guards are welded into a solid chain. They, Chenikal, Wiedemann, and Uspensky, much like the Soviet Activists, unite with the Soviet power as a whole. They are united by the blood they have shed in common, and the constant hatred of the rest of the community. The solidarity of the whole band, their activities, and the ruthlessness of their leaders guarantee their existence, shameful and discreditable as it is.

Chenikal walked by my side.

„Can you see now, Comrade, what sort of work we have to do? How on earth can I discover the culprit? In the Sixth Barrack they threw a pike last night at the guard on duty.”

„What sort of pike?”

„Home-spun, a stick with a nail in it. Caught him right in the back, not too badly, but still far from pleasant. That's how we live. Here's another case. Last spring they put broken glass into the cauldron in the freemen's kitchen. Luckily the cook noticed it, since the glass was not broken too fine. You know I've been mixed up in guerrilla warfare, and that's war for you, when you don't know which side will cut you up. And they did cut us up like cabbages, at that. But I give you my word, that was far pleasanter than this is.”

I agreed with him politely, he was quite sincere, although incapable of seeing the other side.

## Wiedemann Seizes Me by the Throat

When we returned to Camp, the roll-call showed sixteen missing, and Chenikal was terrified. Half an hour later, I was summoned by the Chief of the Vokhr, who looked like a boa constrictor anticipating a choice dinner.

„So-o,” he drawled, „sixteen ran away from you.”

„No one ran away from me,” I parried.

„Don’t play the innocent with me, or I’ll . . . ” he thundered.

Some people are foolish. So I had to go through the farce of establishing my social standing with him. I sat on his desk and produced the superfine packets of cigarettes I had obtained through Uspensky’s special requisition from the Medgora distributing centre, the only favour I had accepted from him. The possession of about a hundred packets of these is immediately indicative of one’s membership of the privileged class, especially in a Camp. At the sight of these the Chief’s tongue was paralysed.

I selected one and handed him the pack. „Smoke? Ah, by the way, tell me, how old are you?”

„Thirty-five,” he blurted out, and then cut himself short. „What business is it of yours, anyway?”

Don’t think that you can get away with anything with me!”

„It is my business, in a way. The fact is, you are thirty-five and not three years old, and therefore you are old enough to realise that one man can’t keep his eye on a hundred ‘bezprizorniki’ in a forest.”

„Why did you sign for them, then?”

„I signed for the man-power to do certain work. If you failed to provide the guard, as you did, you are responsible for it. Now I will tell you that if you dare to shout at me again, it may end very sadly for you. Remember that!”

„I shall report you to the Chief of the Colony . . .” he began.

„You should have started with that.”

I lighted a match and politely offered it to him. He was completely disconcerted.

That night I went to see Wiedemann. Quite probably I had been watched, because the Chief of Vokhr made his entrance close on my heels. He was obviously afraid that I might steal a march on him, and send in an unfavourable report. Now he was putting his best foot foremost.

„The Comrade here has taken out a hundred boys, and sixteen ran away from him.”

Wiedemann showed very little interest. „Sixteen, did you say?”

„That’s right, Comrade Chief, sixteen.”

„Well, good riddance, and to hell with them!”

„Three came back, and said that one had been suffocated in the swamp. They tried to get him out, but very nearly perished themselves.”

„To hell with them,” ejaculated Wiedemann to the well-nigh speechless Chief of Vokhr, and then turned to me.

„Now, Comrade Solonevich, you will stay with us. I have just now called up Korizun and settled with him about everything. He had promised to transfer you here long ago. Your personal effects will be delivered here from Medgora by the G.P.U. . . .”

His manner was quite courteous though admitting of no argument; but under the polite veneer, I could detect the dangerous fangs of a Soviet administrator. I felt sick at heart, and even suspected that he had not called upon Korzun at all, but what could I do to counteract it? He did not really need me at all, but the Vokhr was under his orders, and he might detain me here long enough to ruin my scheme to escape. The fact that my possessions would be delivered by the G.P.U., meant that they would discover the stores

of food not yet transferred to the forest cache, and the two compasses recently pilfered from the Technicum by Yura. Detention itself was not so very serious, for Yura might appeal to Uspensky, quite probably with disastrous consequences to Wiedemann. But the compasses and provisions would certainly mean exposure.

I felt Wiedemann's grip, but I had to keep cool at all costs. Mechanically, I took out the cigarettes, and offered them to Wiedemann, who stared at me in astonishment.

„In sober truth, Comrade Wiedemann, just before my departure, I applied to Comrade Uspensky for a transfer to this colony . . .” I explained.

„Why Uspensky? What has he to do with it?” roared Wiedemann, but I judged by his roaring, that he was not quite certain of his ground.

„I am engaged in arranging the All-Camp Spartaciad, and Comrade Uspensky is in charge. Korzun is not aware of this, because he has lately been absent from Medgora. As it is, my transfer here before the completion of the Spartaciad cannot even be considered. If you detain me here despite Uspensky's express orders, there is likely to be considerable . . . shall we say unpleasantness?”

„That's none of your business, I won't let you go away from here, so there is nothing more to talk about. Korzun can talk it over with Uspensky without your assistance.” That was bad. Wiedemann could really detain me and issue an order to the G.P.U. to deliver my belongings, compasses, and all.

This might easily entail very serious consequences. To put it bluntly, our lives, Yura's, Boris', and mine, depended upon my ability to circumvent Wiedemann now. Yes, this was bad!

„I have already suggested to you that Korzun is not quite well enough posted in the matter, which is very pressing. If the preparations should be delayed for two or three weeks. . . .”

„You may go,” Wiedemann dismissed the Chief of Vokhr, who faced about and marched out.

„What’s all this drivel about the Spartaciad?”

Lord, wasn’t he transparent, this Wiedemann! He was only too anxious to set his teeth into me, but there at Medgora sits a boss with a ‘big stick’, and how the dickens is he to know what amount of intimacy there is between this ‘reporter’ and the boss? Catch the nigger by the toe, is all well enough, but it may be too late to let him go. What with the boss, and the stick, and administrative pride, he did not know what to do. So, in lieu of an answer, I got out a copy of *Re-construction*, and a stack of general orders on the Spartaciad.

„Would you care to look at these?”

His jaw drops as he looks through the stuff, and his tail begins to wag, figuratively speaking. Deep down in his inquisitorial soul, he thanks his Creator that he had not bitten too deeply.

„But in principle, you have nothing against a transfer here, when the Spartaciad is finished, have you?” he rounded out the interview politely.

„Surely not,” I answered.

Phew ... I was out of it. I could, of course, have asked him what he needed me for. But let that slide!

An arctic storm was raging that night, rattling the windows with blasts of sand. I could not sleep.

My head was full of thoughts of the coming winter, and of four thousand unfortunate children cooped up in barracks, snowed under, groping about in the fading light of smoky oil lamps. No matter how they hurried they could not ‘liquidate’ four thousand children before winter. I remembered the pouch the boys had filled with makhorka and restored to me: here was an example of humane response to kindly treatment. Did this not prove that they were not beyond redemption, these thieves through force of

circumstance? Did it not mean that the Divine spark, so to speak, was still alive in their souls?

Should I stay after all?

No, it was impossible: technically—because of the Spartaciad, and our escape on July 28th—and mentally: nothing, nothing at all could help them. Help would only prolong their agony. I was thinking about the boy who had been drowned in the swamp, of the other thirteen. How many of them would perish? And of the little girl with the frozen pot; of Professor Avdeyev, who had frozen to death on the way back to his barrack; of the typesetter Misha, of my bitter experience in all my creative work, and my harsh acquaintance with the fate of humanity in this Socialist paradise. No, there was no way in which I could help them.

In the morning I left the 'Second Bolshevo' like a thief in the night, silently stealing away without even saying goodbye to the 'zavklub', lest he take me by the buttonhole and try to persuade me to stay. What could I have said to him?

There is somewhere in this world a „League for the Defence of the Rights of Man”. . . . But both man and his rights are rather relative quantities of late. A kulak, for instance, is no longer a man, and the League will not even make a pretence of defending his rights. But there are rights that seem to be beyond dispute, the rights of children. They were accountable neither for the Revolution, nor for the counter-Revolution. Yet they perish, and that without any personal guilt, or responsibility for what is occurring. I have added nothing in my description of the colony, either to blacken the Bolsheviks, or whitewash the 'bezprizorniki'. But the gist of the matter is this: the Bolsheviks have to remove vagrancy from the sight of the civilised world—vagrancy which they themselves have created, and continue to create. The Bolshevik Government, which professes itself 'the most humane in the world', has deprived millions of children of their parents, thrown them out of human society, and doomed them to slow but inevitable death from starvation, cold, scurvy, and tuberculosis.

In the vast Soviet paradise, there are other colonies such as this. The one I have described is on the bank of the W.B.C., twenty-seven kilometres north of the town of Povenets.

If the „League for the Defence of the Rights of Man” has even a vestige of conscience left, it must be interested in these colonies.<sup>18</sup>

## The Watershed

We travelled North on the same motor-boat along the same dismal deserted canal; and in a quarter of an hour, 12 years [?] the age for capital punishment of boys to the forest hid the midden-pile of the vagrants' colony from view.

As a matter of fact, my departure savoured strongly of flight, even desertion. But what was I to do?

Build football grounds on the skeletons of those children? One had already sunk in the swamp, and what had become of the other thirteen?

The canal was silent and deserted, and I was the only passenger on the boat. The cabin intended for ten or fifteen passengers was filthy, the deck was damp under the morning mist. The captain at the wheel beckoned me into the wheel-house, warm and sheltered, yet affording a view of forests and swamp, or the narrow ribbon of the canal lined with roughly fashioned granite. In spots, the granite had slid down, and for hundreds of metres the sand seeped gently into the water. The captain gave the stones a wide berth, keeping to the further bank.

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<sup>18</sup> I must add that before the decree legalising the execution of minors was passed, boys were shot just the same, pursuant simply to Soviet practice, on the part of local authorities or the G.P.U., without any form of trial.



„What is the matter with the canal? They had barely finished its construction when it began to break up!”

The captain shrugged his shoulders phlegmatically. „Sand is nothing, but even the dams give way. You will see for yourself beyond the watershed. Rotten work, simply rotten; everything scamped, on the hurry-up and get it over plan. No wonder that as soon as the construction was completed, it began to collapse. Last spring, the excavators were working here, and patched it up a little; but now we have the same trouble once more. But as I say, the sand is nothing, it's the dams that make people wonder. And now, they plan another canal. God forbid!”

I had heard at Medgora that they were contemplating a second canal. The survey had already begun, and the production department vaunted a map with the two canal beds laid out, but as far as I knew, the construction had not commenced.

„What do they transport on this canal?” I asked.

„Well, you, for instance.”

„And what else?”

„The likes of you.”

„What about cargo?”

„What cargo? Yesterday two barges of exiled women only, were towed to the Seventh Division below Povenets, if you can call it cargo. Well, you son of a bitch. . . .”

The motor boat sluggishly piled on a sand bank.

„Stop, full astern!” shouted the captain, and in a minute the motor was reversed and splashed up a lot of water without moving the boat an inch.

„Here we are. Indulged in conversation and piled up,” he laconically remarked.

A greasy mechanic emerged from below and in his turn berated the captain. „Well, nothing to do but push,” the latter phlegmatically observed. There were a few poles with a cross-piece of board at one end to prevent adhesion in the sand, and we utilised these while the motor worked astern. The boat did not respond at first, but suddenly and softly slid from the bank and swerved its stern against it before the captain was back at the wheel to right it. The mechanic once again disappeared in the malodorous hold, and the captain and I went back to the wheelhouse.

„We have had enough of chewing the rag, and the sand seeps out of all cracks and crannies. You know that if I as much as touch a stone, I’ll get five years extra,” he said.

„Are you a prisoner, too?”

„What else could I be?” he inquired enigmatically.

Two hours later we came to the Watershed, the highest point of the canal. From this spot on it goes north to Soroka. A large and completely empty basin, restricted to the north by a large dam, constructed of logs. Above the lock was a triumphal arch composed of timber and bearing an inscription testifying to enthusiasm, victories, and what not. Another similar arch of granite straddles the road to the Camp.

A spacious although empty square paved with cobblestones is flanked on the north by a long two-storey log house, facing which stands a bust of Dzerzhinski<sup>19</sup> on a granite pedestal, so this is probably Dzerzhinski Square. All is deserted and smothered with sand, and not a soul in sight. After a tour through the square, I finally located the watchmen on the lock, dozing peacefully. They informed me that the Camp was two miles out in the woods beyond the square.

The G.P.U. operative, well fed and wearing a cavalry uniform, who came out of the ramshackle guard-house before which stood three bedraggled and

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<sup>19</sup> A former most bloodthirsty chief of G.P.U.

none too well-nourished Vokhr guards, did not even wish to glance at my documents.

„Never mind the passes,” he said, „I can see by your face that you are one of us.”

Some compliment, upon my word! To think that my mimicry was so convincing that all this scum recognised me as one of themselves. But as I passed through the wire fence into the Camp, I gathered the secret of the operative’s perspicacity. I did not appear hungry, hence I was one of their fraternity. I presently realised that I had never seen such a miserable Camp before, with the possible exception of the Nineteenth Division. I did not chop wood or dig sand, nor did I drive the piles into that White Sea-Baltic toy of Comrade Stalin’s. From the very first day, the three of us represented the Camp’s highest social standing. Besides, Podporozhie was a brand-new and super-shock Camp, and Medgora was the capital of the entire project; while here at the Watershed stood an ordinary Camp, neither new nor important. The rickety old barracks were covered with canvas, bark, and patches of tar paper and tin. The dug-outs, barely above the level of the ground, were roofed with earth and grass.

The downcast, pale, grey men were dragging their feet, shod in birch-bark sandals. The majority were dressed in their own rags. One fairly intelligent-looking man was clad in a woman’s jacket, probably sent to him from the depleted wardrobe of his relatives. Many were shod in rags, wound about their feet and tied with bark strings.

I noticed myself dragging my feet as they did, I was so depressed by their plight. No, I made up my mind not to go North, to Segezha, Kem, or even Murmansk. To hell with it. I had witnessed sufficient misery for a hundred normal lives. There was something revolting and degrading in this scene of semi-starvation, penury, and oppression, and in comparison Medgora seemed like home, cozy and familiar.

At headquarters I found the Chief of the Camp, a jaundiced, ruffled, and bewildered little man, who immediately intimated that he did not credit my

account of the Spartaciad, and even less my mission to find football material among his half-dead charges. His tone was respectful but slightly sarcastic, as if he wanted to show that he had nibbled at such bait before without being hooked, and that he knew full well what the real reasons for my visit were.

To persist would have been foolish, so we exchanged meaning glances, and let it go at that. The Chief remarked in closing that my errand would prove fruitless, in view of the recent uprising.

I had heard nothing of this from the Camp administration, but I did not want to lose his confidence by admitting my ignorance. Either from a desire to communicate his information, or to convey to a worker from the centre the difficulties and complexities of his position, he presently told me all about it. This incident had occurred three weeks previously. A sudden revolt broke out in which the prisoners cut down the guards and the Chief of the Camp, and set out for Povenets. The 51<sup>st</sup> G.P.U. Sharp-shooters Regiment drove most of them into a swamp, where they met their end. The rest, and those who surrendered, were taken back to Camp, a few shot, and some moved further North, while prisoners from Segezha and Kem were sent to replace them. The Chief had no illusions concerning his personal safety, and expected death from ambush, if not from a revolt.

„So you see, Comrade, what our situation is. Our situation,” he relished the word, „is critical and, to tell the truth, altogether rotten. . . . Look at those moujiks walking round there. Do you know what they think about? Well, everyone here knows. There were a few left in the forest, and they fell upon the woodcutters’ brigade, cut down the guards, and ate them.”

„What do you mean, ‘ate them’?”

„Very simply. Hacked them to pieces, and carried them along. Later on our patrols followed their tracks and found the remains of a big camp fire, and some charred bones. What else can they find to eat in the forest?”

And that seemed to be that—communal feeding in the land of social reconstruction! Oh, Lord, what had we come to? I must get back to Medgora. At least, they remain free from cannibalism there.

I had dinner at the canteen, tried to stroll round the Camp, but gave it up, and did not know what to do with myself. The boat was going back at three o'clock in the morning, so fifteen hours remained to kill. My meditations were disturbed by the Chief of the Camp who inquired: „Why don't you look round the lumber camp? They are working there.”

The suggestion was not bad, but what should I use for my journey? The Chief promised me a horse and saddle, and though I am no Cossack, I thought I might manage the eight miles to the Camp. In half an hour a saddled nag was brought to the door, where it stood head down with its legs sprawled out. I mounted ostentatiously, and pulled the bridle. Nothing happened. I kicked the animal with the same result. Someone handed me a switch, but neither heels nor switch made the slightest impression on my Bucephalus. He remained as immovable as a monument.

„That horse needs food,” ventured an Activist, „we shall have to swing him out.”

He obligingly caught hold of the bit and pulled. The horse tried to walk. I must have resembled the Great Khan, his charger led by the Grand Vizier, or looked like an oaf. The convicts were surveying this queer spectacle, highly entertained. In this manner I left the gates, and went on for a mile or so, when my steed came to a standstill. I tried to get him going, and to walk by his side until it seemed safe to bestride him, but no sooner had I done this than he stood stock still. At last I gave up the struggle and decided to lead the horse back to Camp.

The horse nibbled at the sparse moss and grass blades, while I sat on a stone to light up, and to decide for the nth time that I was not going North. I could always tell Uspensky a plausible story. Of course, this decision was somewhat faint-hearted, but to depress my mind and shatter my nerves with the sight of such misery for a fortnight, would prove impossible. Let it

go! Besides I felt uneasy about Yura, if anything went wrong with the Spartaciad, Yura might not be capable of dealing with it. No, the next boat back for me.

Around the bend, I heard voices; and soon a column from the lumber camp came into view, about fifty men, under a strong convoy of Vokhr guards. The convicts were as underfed as my horse, and passed without raising their heads, as they shuffled along. One of the guards inspected me carefully and saluted smartly, while some of the prisoners glanced with pathetic eyes, and the column moved, like a funeral procession. It reminded me of another column I had once seen.

In the summer of 1921, my wife, Yura, and I were locked up in the Odessa Cheka. The technique of applying 'the highest measure', as shooting was then euphemistically termed, was conducted as follows: three times a week, in the early afternoon, there arrived at the prison gates a truck (surrounded by a cavalry convoy), to take the condemned away. Who was condemned, no one really knew, and the suspense of waiting deepened as time went on; until we heard the clang of an iron door, and the staccato of the harbinger of death, announcing in alphabetical order the names of those about to depart:

'Borisov. . . . Ivanov. . . . Petrov. . .' The next is 'S', and our hearts stop beating. . . . 'Trofimov' . . . Not yet, not yet. Pitifully, hunger operated like an anaesthetic, and in its absence the bond between body and soul would have been unable to stand the strain. From the window of our cell we could see the street, and once we saw as many as three trucks, guarded by a whole troop of cavalry.

Time dragged on, but the messenger of death did not appear, and while we were waiting we were promenaded in the yard, fenced off from the entrance by rusty sheets of corrugated iron with holes sufficiently large to enable me to gain a glimpse of what was proceeding.

In the middle of the enclosure stood a solid square of about eighty youths and girls. Most of the men wore Ukrainian shirts, and the young women gay

ribbons and coin necklaces. This was evidently an Ukrainian 'prosvita',<sup>20</sup> patriotic people, raided during their evening dance. The dreadful doom that hung over them was emphasised by the complete silence that prevailed. There was no sound, no sob.

They were surrounded by about sixty chekists with revolvers and guns. To-morrow their youthfulness, their surging life, would be extinguished, and all their maiden promise would be degraded to a mass of corpses, by the action of a machine-gun in a Cheka cellar. There were red circles before my eyes, and I had to tear myself away from this spectacle of direful death.

Thirteen years later, this scene remained as tragically clear as if I were witnessing it once more through an orifice in the rusty iron fence. The group of prisoners that previously passed me were equally doomed with those others in the yard of the Odessa Cheka. I thought to myself, yes, I must cut and run! I am not proceeding North; I must return to Medgora; I must reserve all my energy and intellect for our projected flight. . . . I held the horse by the bit, dragging it back to Camp. Farther along the road, I passed a yokel with a big lumber saw. He looked at the horse and at me, and pronounced philosophically: „They've done for him.” They—needed no elucidation.

The Chief of the Camp offered me another horse, without any guarantee, however, that it would prove any better than the first; but I declined with thanks, and explained to him that I must be on my way.

„But the motor-boat will only go North to-morrow,” he protested. I intimated that I must get back to Medgora, where I could take a train. He glanced at me with fear and suspicion.

It was only about six in the evening, and I had more than nine hours to wait, but I was not anxious to kill time in Camp. I hitched on my knapsack, and made for the landing. The cobblestone square and the lock were as forlorn as when I first saw them. A sharp wind was damaging Revolutionary

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<sup>20</sup> Ukrainian League of National Culture and Education

fustian displayed on the triumphal arch, dust laden and rain bespattered, the arch that acclaimed enthusiasm, construction and reconstruction, reforging, and Chekist procedure in general.

A wide dam led to the locks. At the bank, the water was in motion, and the gigantic piles protruded like the ribs of a mastodon, and were equally effective. The road along the dam was rutty and in places sunken. I walked over to the lock, where a sleepy-looking guard eyed me askance, but said nothing. The control box was deserted. Through the cracks in the lock-gate, water was trickling. The ribbon of the canal stretched northward, cut in places by an overflowing swamp, sluggishly but persistently cleansing the stone facing.

If this was the state of the canal at the Watershed, what must it be further North? It was evident that the canal, barely completed, was already in an expiring state. The flaming utterances of enthusiasm had not yet subsided, the vanguard of the Cheka-way-of-doing-things had not yet completely rotted in the swamps, the survivors had probably not so far reached the B.A.M. project in Eastern Siberia, when decrepitude had already set in on the unused canal.

I went back to the landing which was still lifeless, and rolled myself in a blanket in an abortive attempt to sleep. Then I dug myself into the sand as a protection from the blast, and so dozed off. I was roused by a rough shout and opened my eyes. Towering against the pale-green evening sky were the silhouettes of three Vokhr guards armed with rifles, examining me in the flickering light of a smoky bull's-eye.

‘What the hell are you sprawling out here for?’ the law wanted to know. I handed the nearest guard my credentials; these, with the awe-inspiring signature of Uspensky, lowered his tones.

„Why don't you go to the inn, Comrade, instead of knocking about here?” and he pointed to the long log building which flanked the square.

„I am waiting for the boat,” I explained.



„We don't know when it will be back, to-morrow or the day after. They will tell you at the inn.”

I thanked them, shook myself out of the sand-pile, and made for the inn. The two rows of windows, most of them with broken panes, did not betray a single light. After a spell of knocking, a woman in a Camp bushlat opened the door and admitted me.

„Rooms? Of course we have rooms. There is but one man in the inn now. But we have no light.

This is the only lamp, and I will have to show you the way.”

She led me into a large room with six bunks covered with straw mattresses, one of which was occupied. For a moment, the occupant showed his sleepy face above the blanket, then dived back into it again. Without undressing, I threw myself on the dirty mattress, and was soon fast asleep.

When I opened my eyes, my room-mate had gone, but his brief-case was still there. From the corridor came sounds of splashing and snorting, then, rubbing his neck and chest, there entered a man in whom I recognised Comrade Korolev.

In 1929-30, when I was acting chairman of the All-Union Bureau of Physical Culture, Korolev was the representative of the Central Committee of the Komsomol. A group of Activists from that committee initiated a campaign for the 'politisation' of physical culture, about which I have written earlier. This 'politisation', of course, led to the complete debacle of the physical culture movement, a result which was obvious from the very beginning even to its originators. These men belonged to the Activist rabble, who did not care a hoot for anything but their own personal success. But even Activists have their Nemesis. A career, even when secured, is of little permanent benefit, and if unsuccessful, involves drudgery work as an underling in some unsavoury task, or may end in a Concentration Camp. And that was what eventually overtook this group.

For a time, however, the group was triumphant. Out of the twenty members of the bureau, only two members put up a fight, Korolev and myself. I opposed the Activists because physical culture, even in its Soviet character, is one of the means of retarding a complete deterioration of youth, and Korolev withstood them because physical culture seemed necessary to improve the fighting qualities of the soldiers of the World Revolution. Our aims differed, but for a while at least, we travelled the same road. So, in Soviet Russia, the seemingly irreconcilable are reconciled. A Russian engineer assists in building the Cheliabinsk Tractor Works in the hope that the tractors will benefit the Russian people, and a Communist helps in purblind confidence that the tractors will serve the Soviet Union as a basis for World Revolution; until such time as the 40,000 tractors of the annual output can be converted into 40,000 machine-gun-mounted light tanks, which will swarm over Poland, Finland, and other lands, 'dekulakizing' them, and oppressing them with a bigger and a better G.P.U.

Thus, in a less important department, I had acted, also. I organised sport, Russian or Soviet, as you will, which included the rifle associations. How would the results of my work be utilised? For the people? For the retention of the Revolution in one country, or for the „overgrowth of the Russian Revolution into the World Revolution?" I did not know, and honestly, do not know even to the present day. This question will not be solved until the time comes.

The colossal strength, accumulated on the 'commanding heights', now economically useless but still formidable, will some day be transformed either into a tremendous, so far unknown, improvement of the country, or into a no less colossal but still unaccountable World disaster.

There is nothing in this to brag about. What I had done for sport, and I have done a thing or two, has been so far utilised for deeper entrenchment of the Revolution. My brain children, the stadiums, sport grounds, etc., fell into the hands of the 'Dynamo'. They are used therefore by the Yakimenkos, the Radetskys, and Uspenskys. Ergo, speaking objectively and apart from any

good or bad intentions, I unwittingly contributed my share to the strengthening of the 'sword of the proletarian dictatorship'.

But in 1929 I still cherished illusions, it is difficult for any man to live without illusions. Korolev, who had the courage to oppose the Komsomol clique, became in a sense my 'comrade-in-arms'. We were completely defeated. I, in my capacity of an 'irreplaceable specialist', got out of the tussle scot-free, but Korolev, a Party worker, replaceable with the facility of a Ford spare-part, disappeared from view. Later, his wife came to the office to beg my help in staying the dispossession order putting her out of a miserable room to which she and her child were entitled as the family of a ranking Party worker. From her I ascertained that Korolev had been transferred to some outlying district. Five years had since passed, and here we were together again.

## The Conquerors

In bitter-sweet irony we surveyed each other. I rose on my elbow, Korolev put down his towel, somewhat at a loss. His thirty-year-old face, clean shaven as of yore, was lined with a few extra wrinkles, and there was silver at his temples.

„All roads lead to Rome, eh?“ I smiled, and he shrugged his shoulders.

„I saw your name in *Re-construction*, thought it was your brother. How did you get here?“

I gave him a short and slightly edited account of my arrest and deportation, but without any mention of our attempted escape, to which he replied in a still more guarded vein. For his opposition to the Komsomol he had been thrown out of the Central Committee, and transferred to the Northern Urals

as cultural and educational instructor at a colony of 'bezprizorniki'. The vagrants there wounded him.

Out of the hospital, he was transferred to a harvest-requisition campaign in the 'German Republic on the Volga', one of the Soviet Unions. There he was shot in the leg. While still convalescent, he was called out to quell an outbreak of the Ukrainian independents. The repression of the disturbance Korolev glossed over with little detail, but he was then accused of 'fraternising' with the independents, and charged with 'lack of class vigilance', the latter involving expulsion from the Party.

For people of 'Party-komsomol' character, such expulsion is tantamount to something between death and civic extinction. The Party-komsomol and Professional-Union work is all they are acquainted with, or are fitted for. Expulsion closes all channels to activity of this type, and deranges all customary social affiliations. A man such as this is dismissed from the ruling order, while the doors of those he supervised remain closed to him. A Viceroy of India, when deprived of office, might sooner obtain employment from Mahatma Ghandi, than a fallen Bolshevik with the people. He is an outcast, neither a peacock nor a crow, as we Russians put it. He may be clerking in a co-operative store or doing unskilled labour, and every new companion will ask him, why does he, the son of a bitch, come among them? In the natural course of events, the outcast will try to accommodate himself with the Party and regain his lost rank and privileges, but without his revolver and the one-for-all and all-for-one protection of the governing clique, he has little chance to escape this *via dolorosa* and remain alive. This is the reason why many of the purged prefer to blow their brains out, before their revolver is taken from them together with the Party ticket.

But from the accusation of 'lack of class vigilance', Korolev managed to clear himself, and he was despatched to W.B.C. to conduct 'party-mass work'. There is activity of this character, whatever the term implies. Such a worker makes the rounds of the Party cells and checks the progress of Party education, advances in the Marx-Stalin theory, and the influence of the cell on the neighbouring non-Party masses. With the W.B.C. Camps as a

background, where there was an average of one and a half 'free-employed' to each section, his occupation was a mere farce, and I told him so. „No worse than your Spartaciad,” he retorted with an ironic smile.

„As a 'khaltura', my Spartaciad is not such a bad invention.” „I do not say it is bad, but my work is not as futile as it may seem on the surface. For instance, I was sent to inquire why a revolt occurred here some time ago.”

„There is nothing to investigate,” I answered.

Korolev drew his shirt over his head and put on his raiment and pistol belt.

„I have to find out why it happened,” he explained, „revolts don't break out in every Camp. There was a special reason here, the local bosses had stolen the food funds, so the prisoners were about prepared to climb the wall. . . .” „For which they probably were shot,” I finished for him. „Cannot help that, you know, the prestige of authority demands that. The prisoners had other channels through which to lodge a complaint,” he continued sententiously.

There were new overtones in his voice that I had not heard before, a certain administrative aplomb.

I looked at him uncertainly, but he only shrugged his shoulders and preserved silence, slightly on the defensive. He must have learned his lesson, and our unexpected encounter was an unwelcome reminder of events he had to forget for his own sake.

„You sound like an editorial from *Re-construction*. At Moscow, right in the Executive Committee of the Komsomol, you lodged a complaint against the action of the administration, and you know as well as I do what resulted.”

„We cannot help it, there is such a thing as revolutionary discipline, and we have no right to question the administration of the Party. This is just like war-time: 'ours not to reason why'?”

At Moscow, Korolev never used this tone, nor talked in this strain. He then had an opinion of his own and was always ready to support it. Apparently,

labour at the bottom of the administrative ladder had been a hard lesson to him.

„Perhaps we had better forget all that. I know, for instance, you want to tell me about this idiotic canal. Everything goes slightly worse than we thought, yet it does go on. And we have to march with it. If we want to, march willingly; if we don't, we shall be dragged along. That is all there is to it. Better tell me, what do you intend to do for yourself?”

With greater imaginativeness than truth I outlined my present position in Camp, and Korolev nodded approvingly.

„The main thing is to get your son out. When I return to Medgora I shall talk to Uspensky, but he must get out of here by autumn. And you, if only you put the Spartaciad over, can be made an instructor in the G.U.L.A.G. Then you will work on the All-Union scope.”

„Tell me where to find you at Medgora?” Korolev said in parting, „I shall be there first thing in August.”

I explained where to look for me, but gave no hint of my hope that the ‘first thing’ in August would not find me at Medgora, nor anywhere else in the U.S.S.R., either. We left the inn together.

„Would it not be nice to be in Moscow now?” he said wistfully. „One grows so dull and primitive out here.”

There was indeed scope enough for that, but I did not want to resume the discussion. We shook hands. The representative of the ruling Party trudged toward the Camp, lugging his grip and brief-case, and nursing his wounded leg. The labour on the bottom rung of the administrative ladder had broken the lad both physically and morally.

The motor-boat was at the landing, and again I was the sole passenger. The captain invited me to the wheel-house as before, but asked me not to talk, as he didn't want to go aground again, which suited me perfectly. I needed time to think matters over. Maybe some day, *sub speciae aeternitatis*, this

chaos will take form and make sense, especially for people who are willing to dig for sense through senselessness.

Maybe, then, all that is transpiring in Russia will disclose its meaning, reveal its place in the sun, and soothe and set at rest many people's sensibilities.

## The Vanquished

On the desolate bosom of the bay of Povenets (an inlet formed by the backwater of the canal), near the flood gates, were moored two large Volga-type barges. The captain nodded toward them and said:

„Look at those women and children. The devil only knows what they want with them. Now for three days the poor wretches have been loaded and then unloaded from the barges over and over again. I can't understand why they are harried so.”

„What kind of women are they?”

„I suppose some 'dekulakized' peasant women, but I don't know positively, as no one is allowed to go near them.” The motor-boat went on past the barges and landed at the wooden pier. I bade the captain 'good-bye' and went out on the high embankment. Behind the embankment was a small meadow which appeared to be full of flowers. But this flood of colour was occasioned by the varied hues of the children's shirts and dresses, and the coloured kerchiefs and jackets of the women, which were piled up on many iron-bound coflers and chests. On the side of the mead where I was standing, the only place not bounded by water, were about a score of sullen-looking Vokhr guards, armed with rifles. The bus for Medgora was standing ready to go, and two of the three passengers were acquaintances. I left my knapsack with one of the men I knew, asking him to take care of it for me, and went toward the guards, taking out my 'Arabian Nights' cigarette

packet on the way. With an independent air I approached them, nonchalantly lighting a cigarette, and without my even saying 'Open Sesame', they silently spread apart, making space for me to pass, but looking askance at me none-the-less.

I climbed the embankment. One barge was crowded, and looked like a kaleidoscope with the many colours of shirts, kerchiefs, etc., of its passengers. The other was empty. On the slope of the embankment toward the meadow, partly protected from the cold taiga winds, a few score women sat on their chests, bundles, and bags. Many had babies in their arms, while the older children surrounded them. The remainder were sitting round the meadow.

A woman about forty, in a quilted cotton jacket and wearing a man's tom boots, sat on the edge of the meadow, in the company of an old granny and a little girl of about ten. I approached and asked:

„From what place have you people come?”

The woman raised her stony face, full of hatred, toward me. „Go and ask your own kind, they can tell you.”

„I am now asking my own kind,” said I.

She gave me the same look of hatred, and turned away her head toward the other campers. Granny was friendlier and more talkative.

„We come from Voronezh, my dear, from Voronezh; there are also many from Kursk, but most of them are on board of the barge. We were left here in the cold and wind. Oh, Lord, how tired we all are. Can you tell us, sonny, where and when they will ship us?”

„I don't know, Granny, I am also something like you, a prisoner.”

The woman again turned her head. „A prisoner, you say?” „Yes, a prisoner.”

She closely examined my leather windbreaker, my spectacles and cigarette, and turned away with a sneer:



„We know them . . . such prisoners. . . . All of you are jail birds, and it is a shame the likes of you were not hung in the Tsar's time.”

Granny looked at her askance, and with her thin bony hands began straightening the head-covering of the little girl, who snuggled closer. The child clung tenaciously to her, was it cold or fear?

„This is the third day that we are being plagued in this place. Yesterday every one received a pound of bread, but to-day we are sitting about without anything to eat. We might have bartered something for food, but the soldiers won't let us through.”

„You could not barter anything here, Granny, we are all without bread.”

„That's for our sins, O Lord, for our sins.”

‘But whose sins—that's the question,’ the woman said grimly and without turning.

Granny surveyed her with fear and compassion.

„Whose sins? The Lord only knows, and He the Righteous shall judge. . . . What a bitter cup we have drained! What a bitter cup! Oh, my God!” And the old woman convulsively shook her head.

„Since spring we have been under way, and how many children have died, I can't tell.” Then lowering her voice to a whisper, so that the other woman should not hear, she added, as if confidentially: „This poor woman has lost two children. People say that it is easier to die among one's own people, but here we are travelling about on this accursed barge, the children are dying like flies, and we must bury them so, without any funeral service or Christian burial . . . simply take them ashore, and then into a pit.”

The peasant woman turned toward Granny and said:

„Oh, do please be still!”

„Why, Granny, have you been hauled about since spring?”

„And who knows, Sonny? Our men were taken away last autumn to re-settle them somewhere. We were taken in the spring, they said, to join them at the place where they have settled. It looks, however, as if they have lost them, our men, I mean, so they just drag us from pillar to post, load, and unload.

Over there at the back of the lake, we helped to dig out stumps, in another place we were put to work shovelling sand, but mostly we have lived on this barge. If they would only, from fear, if not for love of God, at least build a roof over this barge, for now we live like the animals, unprotected from wind and weather. Have you, perhaps, heard, Sonny, where they have taken our men?”

„I don't know, but I feel they have left their hardest days behind them.”

The so-called ‘free-exiled-settlements’ under the supervision of the Colonisation Department of the W.B.C. were situated on a comparatively narrow strip of land between Povenets and Segezha. There were eighty such colonies or ‘free settlements’. They differed from the Concentration Camps to the extent that their inmates were not under the direct charge of the G.P.U. They had no armed guards, nor did they receive any rations. Generally the G.P.U. conveyed these exiled peasants, usually with their families, gave out ‘instruments’: i.e. axes, scythes, shovels, and to each member of the family one pood (36 lb.) of grain for ‘inventory’, and left them to work out their own destiny. I regret that I never had an opportunity of visiting any of these settlements.

I have seen them only on the maps in the Colonisation Department and in its plans, projects, and photographs. In this Department were groups of intellectual people of the same type as at Svircamp. For understandable reasons, I cannot say very much about these groups. But I can, without risk to any one, assert that owing to their kind efforts, the peasants in these free settlements were not left in an utterly hopeless condition. Of course, many different devices were employed, but of their character I cannot speak with the same freedom as when dealing with my own evasions. The remarkable physical endurance and capacity of these peasants, seconded by the support

they received from the Camp Intelligentsia, placed these 'free settlers', so to say, on their feet, and preserved them from starvation.

They engaged in all sorts of forestry work, served as 'hired hands' for the Camp, and in fishing, snaring game-birds, trapping wild animals for fur, and supplying the Leningrad co-ops with mushrooms and berries. They have also with almost incredible rapidity accustomed themselves to the unusual conditions of climate, soil, and labour.

Therefore I felt justified in telling the old granny I was sure the greatest of their hardships were behind them, that sooner or later their men would be found, that they would somehow acclimatise themselves in their new homes. Not so conveniently as in the old ones perhaps, but things would improve in the end. She heaved a deep sigh and fervently and reverently crossed herself.

„May God only grant us this: and if it should not be so good, where is it good now? Here or there it is the same—hunger. Only here the soil is strange, it is a cold soil, what can one raise in such earth?”

„In such soil, you can only dig graves,” grimly cut in the peasant woman, who showed no sympathy with my attempts to hearten them.

„Here you must not make your living from the land, but from the forest. In the Tsar's time, the Karelians were a prosperous peasantry.”

„It is just the same to us where we are, only we might be able to live, Sonny, if they would only stop torturing the people. As far as I am concerned, Siberia or anywhere else, only leave us in peace. It makes no difference to me, Sonny, I have lived long enough, but God does not call me to Him. Many have died who desired to live, and many want to „Do keep still, how many times have I asked you?” sadly implored the woman.

„All right, I shall talk no more,” hurriedly answered Granny, „but I have just talked with another human creature, and now my heart feels easier. He says we will not die of starvation, and that other people have managed to live here, and even live well.”

A shrill whistle sounded from the boat landing. I turned and saw approaching a strange group of Vokhr guards, ten or twelve, with a Chief at the head. The Chief cried: „Hey, you women, get on the barge quick as hell, you are going to your husbands for new honeymoons!”

I am glad to say, not one of the guards grinned at this witticism of their Chief.

They came nearer to us. „And who in hell are you?” demanded the Chief.

I raised my eyes rather indifferently to him and answered coldly: „An Instructor from Medgora.”

„Ah . . .” he glanced at me, and moved along. „Hey, you, all of you, shake a leg, hurry up and get your things on board,” he bawled to the crowd of women and children. In the midst of the gathering a child commenced to cry.

„We are now being embarked for the fourth time from one barge to another,” said Granny fussily rising to her feet. „What do they really think? God forgive me!”

A morose-looking Vokhr guard approached. „Come on, Grandmother, I’ll help you.”

„Oh, thank you, Sonny, my arms are so weak, I can’t lift much, we poor old women haven’t much strength.”

„But these are heavy old junk boxes, have you got stones in them ?” asked the second guard.

„What stones, Sonny, the last things are there which we could save, a few pots and pans. . . . How can one get along without a pot? We have worked all of our lives, and all we had left, we carried out on our shoulders.”

„You kulaks have worked, you say,” mockingly said the other guard, „And for your work you have been sent to a Camp?”

The peasant woman rose from her chest and holding out a wide, calloused, toil-hardened hand.

„Just look at my hand, have you ever seen such hands on a bourgeois?”

„Go to the devil’s mother!” said the guard, „Give me your chest and take the other end.”

„Oh, thank you, Sonnies,” said Granny, „God give your mother help, should she need it, by such kind hands as yours, which are helping us.”

The guard raised the chest and stumbled on a stone.

„To hell with it, the sons of bitches have filled the place with stones,” and kicking the stone viciously, he continued cursing furiously.

„One should not dare to profane God in this way, Sonny.” „Ah, what, here one not only dares God, but . . . Well then, let us carry your chest.”

The bizarre and motley crowd of women and children about five hundred in all, screaming, crying, and howling, began embarking. One sack plunged in the water. A woman screamed shrilly after some Marooksa lost in the crowd. Another woman fell from the landing stage into the canal. Some of the guards were silent and morose, some kept swearing and damning everything in the world carrying all the chests and bundles, or, standing like heathen gods, observed the chaos caused by this G.P.U. banishment!

# THE ESCAPE

## Our Surroundings

As the motor-boat drew nearer Medgora, I was overcome with doubt and misgiving. Yet there was no rational explanation of my fears save that in contemporary Russia as a whole and especially in Concentration Camps, any feeling of security is rare and fleeting.

In Medgora, nevertheless, I found everything in perfect order: my Spartaciad, my 'physical culturists', and most important of all—Yura. I again became domiciled in Barrack 15. After my experiences in the colony of 'bezprizorniki', the Watershed (Vodorazdel) Division, and the exiled peasant women at Povenets, this barrack, with all its demerits, bore some resemblance to the „Father's house", to which the prodigal son returned from his wanderings in an unkind, alien world.

There still remained sixteen days before our projected flight. Yura was in a cheerful, if fatalistic mood. I, however, did not feel at all cheerful, and was by no means a fatalist. In general, I would not give a cent for all the fatalism in the world. Our destiny is not determined by dependence upon chance, but is decided by our positive or negative activities. Our destiny will be determined by our efforts to reduce risk of failure to a negligible quantity, so minute that it cannot enter into reasonable calculation. At present the principal danger was that the G.P.U. might suspect our evil desire to desert the fertile gardens of Socialism and fly to the barren deserts of the Bourgeoisie. If they entertained any such suspicions this would suggest the presence in our barrack of the 'never sleeping eyes' of an informer.

The 'never sleeping eyes' of informers are never very observant, and if I detected this 'eye,' then immediate steps must be taken to blind it. Owing to

our dread of this optic, our last days in Camp were mainly devoted to a most careful scrutiny of all that occurred in our surroundings.

Ours was one of the most privileged barracks in the whole Camp, and its character was no worse than that of a favoured 'Komsomol' dormitory, the Stalingrad Tractor Works, for instance. It was better conducted than some of the Moscow Students' dormitories, and was vastly superior to the workers' barracks and mud huts at some of the new construction projects, or even to 'Donbas' (i.e. Donetsk Coal-field).

Our barrack stood in a hollow between the administrative town and the lake shore, and was surrounded by small swamps and ever-present puddles. It had a fair number of cavities and cracks in the walls, and was infested by an enormous assembly of bed-bugs.

Our people were mostly birds of passage: some were assigned, others detached, arriving, or departing. It was really a kind of clearing house like any other Soviet institution. The most permanent elements were the administrators of the barrack: the overseer, the 'statistician', two orderlies, and a few 'Activists', forming all sorts of 'troikas' (committees of three)—such as a 'troika for cultural-educational work', 'troika for socialistic competition and shock-work', 'troika for combating attempts to escape', etc. Yura and I were also regarded as permanents, for we occupied quite a special position in the barrack. On account of our Spartakiad duties, we came and went as we liked, sometimes spending the night there and sometimes at Vichka. We did this to accustom the administration to our absence, so to say, to our 'extra-territoriality', but even those 'extra-territorial' rights could not release us from all the pleasures of 'social life'.

The official day's work was from 9 a.m. to 11 p.m., with a break of three hours for dinner. This interval was entirely devoted to waiting in a line to obtain tickets for dinner at one place, while at another were tickets for bread. Having at long last secured the dinner, this left, perhaps, half an hour in which to eat it and wash the utensils for the meal. After eleven o'clock, the more privileged category of prisoners were given supper—the less favoured ones had the repast of Mother Hubbard's dog. The social duties of

the Activists and other inmates of the barrack, commenced at midnight. At twelve or half-past, the chairman of our cultural-educational troika would loudly call:

„Comrades, we shall now have the report of Comrade Solonevich relating his work at the Moscow Automobile Plant.”

The Activists rush to the bunks arousing all who have fallen asleep. Comrade Solonevich descends from his bunk, and silently damning his destiny, the many reports, cultural research, Activists, etc., conscientiously strives to include in a 10-15 minutes' resume everything required concerning the A.M.O. (Moscow Automobile Plant). Of course, no one listens, save the Activists. Sleepy faces look out, and naked legs hang down from the bunks. The report is concluded. „Does any one wish to ask any questions?” How absurd it all is, the people only desire to go to sleep. The cultural troika, however, wishing to show further activity, asks: „Please tell us, Comrade Solonevich, about the conditions of workers' inventions at that plant?” This means another three minutes, but I tell them. „Now explain to us, Comrade Solonevich . . .,” but Comrade S. does not wish to create 'political capital', and in this way lessen the term of his sentence; and besides he is tired of the sorry farce, and to the third question answers: „I don't know everything, I have already told you all I know about the matter.” Instead of permitting us to seek 'Nature's sweet restorer', some other speaker, say a former Kornomolez or Communist, must read a report concerning „the revolutionary enthusiasm of the people of the Orient”.

This will occupy two or three hours, and is not particularly interesting to the sleepy prisoners, and in any case, at two or three in the morning, they don't care a tinker's curse about the matter.

The leader of all of these cultural-educational measures in our barrack was an elderly Leningrad book-keeper with the very succulent surname of Marmaladev. He was a follower of Leo Tolstoy, a vegetarian, a foolish fellow whose head was about as empty as his stomach.



Mr. Marmaladev's antics occasioned two conclusions: first, he mouths much the same as the majority of the Camp Activists about his credulous belief in the honesty of the Soviet Power, and that they will redeem all their promises. For five years he will practically work himself to death, and spend nights, when he should be sleeping, in composing articles and preparing illustrations for the 'wall newspaper' which no one wants or troubles to read. He even compiles accounts for cultural work, etc.

And for all this, he anticipates a reduction of two years from the term of his seven years' sentence. But he is over-sanguine. In reality, he is far more likely to receive an additional term to his sentence, because a man in his overwrought condition must cherish and express some sentiment offensive to the authorities. Should he, however, pull through, his distressing labours will probably leave him a mental wreck, and the benevolent powers will release him to die uncared for. Shortened sentences are not obtained by 'honest Socialistic labour', but exclusively by means of shrewd calculation and expediency, and Marmaladev possesses neither of these qualifications. His fussy activity has about the same value as ploughing the sands. This caused me to form my second conclusion: he had been assigned to our barrack to spy on Yura and me! He gave neither of us any respite from his cultural labours. For some time I observed him closely and with some little uneasiness, until I fully assured myself that he was only the victim of fastidiousness and folly, the leading characteristics of every Activist. Without parade, you were debarred from mounting into the ranks of the Activists, and if you really possess efficiency, the ascent is not worth the trouble. The schedule of Marmaladev included, among other things, an arrangement of flower beds about our barracks. This was perhaps required to provide a proper concept of the 'life beautiful', but I could not help concluding that he would have been better advised, had he planted the humble potato.

'Subbotnik' or 'udarnik' means work done without pay, for the increase of social good, in one's free time. In Camp, such spare time only occurs on your 'days off', if you are lucky enough to have any. During three such days, seventy men from our barrack managed to get five beds ready for plants

which were expected to bloom later. A single man could have done this work in one or one and a half days. Here I was able to observe the enthusiasm and splendour of this 'voluntary' labour for 'the building up of Socialism'. The utter absurdity of the whole proceeding is incredible. There were insufficient shovels, and the men worked with the energy of dying flies in early winter. And when the great task was completed, the product of 210 days' man-power, there were no flower seeds! It was even too late to plant potatoes!

I said, half jokingly, to Marmaladev: „I shall now mention you in *Reconstruction*, charging you 'with embezzlement of two hundred and ten working days'." This nearly frightened him to death, but it removed my misgivings. Had he been a spy, he would have manifested little fear of *Reconstruction*, nor of punishment for wasting manual labour. However, despite his activity, or on account of it, he soon found himself in 'Shizo'. He once wandered beyond the Camp boundary, and fell into the hands of some Activists of the Armed Guard. He was placed in a cell with several engineers from Tuloma. These men had been arrested when attempting to escape into Finland, and for the past six months had been waiting to be summoned before a firing squad. Their wives in Leningrad and Moscow were then arrested, and subjected to a searching investigation as to whether they had in any way aided their husbands in their proposed escape. There were six or seven of these engineers and their fate almost seemed a solemn warning to us.

About this time, one bright summer day, I was sitting in our almost empty barrack, when Yura sauntered in with a copy of Pravda in his hand.

„Do you want to look at it?" he asked satirically, as he handed it to me. There on the front page, encircled with a red pencil, I read:

'Decree of Council of Peoples' Commissars of the U.S.S.R. Should any person be arrested in an attempt to leave the country by escaping abroad, such person will be considered beyond the pale of the law, and be shot immediately. In case of a military person, the same penalty, and in addition

their entire families to be deported to the most remote regions of the Soviet Union.'

This transportation of families also meant death to them from starvation.

We looked at each other in dismay.

„They think, perhaps, to scare us,” said Yura.

„But it will not change our plans,” said I.

„I should say not,” Yura assented, shrugging his shoulders.

We had no further conversation regarding the decree. But afterwards, I often thought what a certificate of poverty, misery, and failure of their entire system the Soviets have given to the whole world, and what little reliance they place on their administration and army.

Imagine any civilised Government in the world (I don't include the Soviets in this category) in time of peace declaring *urbi et orbi*, in order to maintain the patriotism of its officers at a normal level, 'that any one trying to leave the country is to be shot and his family sent to certain death'? What opinion, for instance, would you entertain of the reliability and patriotism of the French Army, if the French Government proclaimed to the world so infamous a threat?

The Bolsheviks are by no means sincere about redeeming their promises, but with regard to threats, they carry them out up to, or over, 100 per cent, 'as far as technically possible'! This new decree need not derange our now completely developed plans, but it suggested a suspicion of the projected flight in certain important personages, probably military, and consequently espionage would increase, and the frontiers be more carefully guarded. Thus, we were again haunted by the fear of informers.

Now, a new orderly officiated as door-keeper and attendant at our barrack. I can't for the moment recall his name. Two of his children lived with him in the building: a little girl about ten, and a boy about seven years old. Yura, always a great lover of little children, liked to play and romp with them, and

soon struck up a great friendship with these youngsters. As no food ration was allowed them, they were fed with morsels by inmates of the barrack.

My attention was at once attracted by this orderly's peculiar expression. His glance was gloomy, yet at the same time, so piercing that it seemed he was almost reading my most intimate thoughts. His look was uncanny, and made me feel very uneasy. Could his be the 'eye' I have so much dreaded? I ransacked my memory for all the terms, intonations, and gestures of Uspensky, Golman, Podmokli. No, there had been nothing suspicious. But people of their type, and attainments, would certainly never betray any suspicion they might harbour by either word or gesture; while this seemingly simple moujik had been set spying, however crudely. Of course I was being watched! How guiltily he changed his expression, whenever I met his staring, piercing glance! Yes, I was being observed. What was to be done?

Should we escape immediately? That would prejudice Boris. Write to him? But if we were being shadowed, he would not receive the letter. It seemed necessary to make some radical modification in our plans, something unsuspected by any one. . . . We hastily sketched a novel scheme. Yura might go into the forest in the direction of our 'cache', I might arrange a trip on the motor-boat with some of the 'Dynamo' people. Usually two men from the G.P.U. accompanied us to fish. I might lure them to a spot near our food reserve, then, after 'liquidating' the two Chekists, I could reach Yura and the supplies at a moment when the Third Division would have no suspicion of any sort. Also, it would be possible to obtain the 'liquidated' Chekists' weapons. After this we could run the boat to some point I knew near the mouth of the Soona River. I was well acquainted with this district, having visited it in our first endeavour to escape. The whole plan was suspended on a single thread, but for the time being I was unable to devise any other. We also discussed other schemes, but for two reasons could not decide on any.

A letter from Boris had arrived. An odd kind of individual came from the Svircamp. He found me in the barrack and began aimlessly talking about this, that, and the other, darting from one theme to another, all

unconnected and utterly absurd; but he annoyed me, at the same time, by always directing his eyes towards me in a most insinuating manner. Later, we went outside, where, after giving me another most searching glance, he uttered a sigh of relief, and remarked:

„Well, now I can see without any credentials that you are the brother of Boris Lukianovich.” (We resemble each other so greatly that strangers often mistake our identity.) Then he handed me a little slip of paper from the false bottom of his birch cigarette case, saying:

„You may read it carefully while I sit down over here.”

The note was laconic and optimistic. There, in an apparently trivial letter, was our old, but well-tried code, simple but so ingenious that no Chekist had ever been able to decipher it. The date fixed for escape remained unchanged —by no means earlier or later. There remained only eight days, and it was quite impossible for Boris to postpone it. The messenger informed me that Boris was working as chief of the Sanitary Section. This is an occupation where a man has practically no rest day or night, and he is in such request from all sides, that Boris’s absence would certainly be noticed within a few hours.

That is why Boris so persistently insisted upon the time: ‘noon, July 28th’! In other respects everything was satisfactory. He had enough to eat, received food packets from outside, was physically fit, mentally alert, and hopeful.

It was only afterwards in Helsingfors that I learned why Boris had been transferred from Podporozhie to Lodeinoye Pole. Nothing had come of his projected ‘convalescent camp’. The food supply was gradually decreased until it ceased altogether. Thousands of people died, the rest were sent somewhere else, and Boris was transferred to Lodeinoye Pole—the capital of the G.P.U. Svircamp. I was gravely concerned about the perils connected with Boris’s flight, which would evidently be attended with greater difficulties than ours. He would be compelled to pass through a large Camp centre, and then, in some way, cross the Svir River, traverse a thickly populated district with, at most, only a few hours’ start of his pursuers. As

Boris is a very methodical, careful man, this would indicate that he must have devised a plan, worked out to the most minute details, and even the slightest variation in the appointed date would upset the entire apple-cart. What was to be done?

My anxious meditations were interrupted by our orderly. When I entered the barrack that afternoon, it was quite deserted, except for the orderly sitting, with drooping head, by the door. He threw one of those mysterious, I may almost say devilish glances at me. I shivered, as I thought: that is the son of a bitch, that is the 'eye'.

I wanted to compose my nerves with some tea, but there was no boiling water. I went to the door, and hoping he would not look up, I asked the drooping figure: „When shall we have boiling water?” He sprang up, saying:

„I will bring you some immediately!”

„But why should you go? I can get it myself.”

„No, no, please allow me to go, because I have a favour to ask you.”

„What favour?”

„I will tell you afterwards.”

What can this mean? I wondered. In a few minutes, he returned with the water. I took two lumps of sugar from my reserve stock, and we sat down to have tea.

Suddenly he arose from the table, went to his bunk, and brought me a crumpled, soiled letter in an envelope of wrapping paper, „I have looked at you so intently that I know you are a good man, and I want to ask you to read this letter to me. It is from my wife. . . . I myself am illiterate. . . . I have shown it to nobody. . . . I felt ashamed to show it to any one, but guess it must have been read by the Censor. . . . As you are a good man. I beg you as I should a priest, to read me what is written there.”

„Then why do you feel ashamed, if you don't know what your wife has written?”

„I do not know, but I can guess. . . . Do read, please, but as at Holy Confession, with no word to anybody . . . and may God bless you.”

The letter, poorly written, disjointed, and badly spelt, was difficult to peruse. I doubt whether even the Censor had patience enough to read it to the end. This queer soiled letter written in spreading scrawls on rough, rumpled paper! It is impossible to reproduce its style. It is difficult to recall the odd interlacing of peasant's polite conventions with details of kolkhoz life, flashes of the personal tragedy of the author, her anxieties about her children at the kolkhoz, and the others with their father at Concentration Camp, and so on. The position may be summed up, as follows:

The chairman of the kolkhoz had for a long time persistently pursued the wife of the orderly. Once, hearing her screams from the barn, her husband had rushed in, to find the chairman attempting to outrage her. Instead of gratifying his desires, the chairman received his deserts—a sound beating! For this ‘terrorist’ act against a representative of the ‘Power’, the orderly was sentenced to Concentration Camp for ten years. Four years of his sentence had already expired. From time to time he sent his wife rusks. He did not use the sugar, nor smoke the ‘makhorka’ he obtained with his ration, but sold them to help his family. However, two of the children he had left in freedom had died, and some soft-hearted chief gave him permission to let his family come to him. But as his wife was ‘fastened’ to the kolkhoz and they would not free her, only two of his children (those now in Camp) had been sent out to him. Two others remained in ‘freedom’ with their mother.

The gist of the letter was : A new chairman of the kolkhoz now pestered his wife with amorous attentions. “. . . and further send you greetings, my dear husband, Auntie Maria, who now is slowly dying, and our little Mitya lies in bed with swollen legs and puffed-out belly, but the chairman won't give us any help. By the Almighty God, I beg you, my dear husband, give me your blessing and allow me to ‘submit’, otherwise I will die first, and I pity our poor dear little children. . . . The chairman is pawing me all the time, but

gives me no 'working days'. God knows and you too, my dear husband, I am your true and virtuous wife."

The orderly stared, blankly at the table. I did not know what to say. . . . What could one say!

"So that is how the matter stands," said the orderly softly. "With such a letter, to whom could one go? . . . My heart was full of forebodings. That is what I call—fate."

I never saw a face so full of grief as that of this poor peasant! For a moment, the idea flashed across my mind of going to Uspensky, showing him this letter, and appealing to his manly instincts. . . .

Perhaps it might be possible to pull some strings in the appropriate Regional Executive Committee . . . but then I thought of the village gang: "Ivan in the kolkhoz, Peter in the Militia (police), etc. Who would go from the Regional Committee to defend the marital rights of some poor peasant woman? Who would seek out and prosecute that vicious circle? The woman and her children would simply be beaten to death. . . .

"Write to her," said the orderly convulsively, "to 'submit'." Great blinding tears flowed down his beard.

Sometimes in this tangled skein of life events take place in a remarkably peculiar manner, past all understanding. What had just passed was a saddening, desperate, hopeless calamity! Of course I felt a deep sympathy with this humble Riazan moujik. Cruel as fate had been to him, it is equally cruel to millions of others. Still I must admit, I felt immensely relieved from the dread of the 'never sleeping eye', and no other evidences of spying were to be observed. At the dictation of this wretched man, I sent greetings to different uncles and aunts, godfathers and godmothers, and among these and other domestic felicitations, inserted the husband's permission for the wife to 'submit'.



His face was stonily set, while tears slowly trickled down his shaggy cheeks. However deeply I sympathised with this unfortunate man, I personally felt very greatly relieved.

I recalled Mayakovsky's saying: „Our planet is but poorly equipped for mirth". But my view is, that the planet is not as much to blame as man himself who uses all of his energies to wreck the lives of others, as well as his own. It seems to me that, the Creator, when on the sixth day, he made man, must have been terribly exhausted from the arduous toil of his previous acts of creation. . . .

## In Search of Arms

Everything was ready for our escape except that we were unprovided with arms. In our two previous attempts, we had been completely equipped, one may say: 'armed to the teeth'. I carried a heavy twelve-gauge Browning automatic, and Yura possessed a double-barrelled shot-gun of the same calibre. We had manufactured our own cartridges, with especially heavy charges of powder behind the buckshot, and poured melted stearine on top. Our experiments had proved that so serviceable a weapon could fell even a bear at a distance of a hundred yards. Boris then carried a very fine carbine of light calibre. Armed in this manner, we had had nothing to fear from an encounter with a G.P.U. post, or a patrol of the frontier guards. The exercise of strict caution on our part had made the probability of such an encounter slight, but if the G.P.U. had really taken the risk of engaging in a skirmish with such a strongly-armed party, the buckshot in our cartridges would have given us enormous advantages, especially in the dense undergrowth of a Karelian forest.

Now, however, we had no arms at all, save our knives—and a knife is helpless against guns. We had devised several schemes to procure arms as

soon as we arrived at Pogra Camp, but all of these involved the death of at least one of the armed guards. Strictly speaking, these projects were the counsel of despair. Undoubtedly weapons were indispensable, but we should have to obtain them at the last moment, at least, within a month of our escape. A possible transfer to another Camp while we held possession of arms, would have meant that we had taken the risk of despatching a guard and concealing accoutrements for nothing.

When Yura and I were at last transferred to Medgora Camp, circumstances were such that I felt that we had become fixtures, at least until the day of our escape. Before anything else I needed rest, for I was near exhaustion. Physically I was too weak to attack two guards at one time single-handed, and the guards always went in pairs, that being the rule.

The season of the so-called 'white nights' was upon us, when twilight, in Northern Russia, lingers long after sunset. Camp patrols, wandering at night along the deserted streets, were quite secure from attack. Thus our attention shifted to the 'Dynamo' target range.

There, in a small room, lived the Instructor, Comrade Levin, and a curious old Siberian peasant, Chumin, who served as a watchman and a kind of guide for Uspensky—the Chief of the whole W.B.C., Chumin was a typical product of the Siberian wilderness. Somewhat deaf, completely illiterate, he knew his forests, land, animals, and fish a great deal better than humankind.

Chumin called on me from time to time and asked: „Is there anything in the newspapers stating when the war will start?” When I replied that there was nothing about a war against Soviet Russia, Chumin always sighed with disappointment, „My Lord, my Lord, no one wants to help us.”

Later he found a way to help himself. When the time was ripe, he just took everything that he could lay his hands on in the 'Dynamo' target range, and disappeared, in a stolen boat, into the wilderness.

He was never captured.

Levin was a tall, lanky fellow of about twenty-five. His awkward frame and dreamy Semitic eyes did not sympathise with the martial profession of arms at all. Regularly every evening he became gloriously drunk in the company of other 'Dynamo' employees, and in the mornings complained bitterly that his prowess in arms was declining.

„Then why don't you stop drinking?"

Sighing heavily, he would answer: „Easy to say, but try, yourself, to endure such a life without intoxicants. Anyway, I am sinking, and it's better to do it in vodka than in water."

In Levin's room, there was quite a collection of weapons: his own, and those of the 'Dynamo'.

There were some rifles, a double-barrelled shot-gun, a Mauser, and several automatics of different makes, besides a stock of cartridges for target practice. The windows of the room, as of the gallery itself, were protected with heavy iron bars. At the entrance, there was a special post of armed guards.

During the day Levin was always in his room or in the gallery; every evening the room was locked and a guard posted at the door. Early in the morning Levin would stagger home alone, or, more frequently, helped by Chumin. Guarded as it was, this was the only place where we could obtain arms. There was no alternative but to attack it.

I laid my plans much in the manner of a detective story. I would go to Levin's room, in breathless silence, surprise and despatch him with a blow on the head. Then I would light his kerosene camp stove, pump it as full of air as possible, and pour denatured alcohol and two or three quarts of kerosene (which were at hand in the room) over the table and floor. After that, I would take the Mauser and an automatic and hide them somewhere in the sand of the range floor, and, just as I had come to see Levin, clad only in my athletic trunks, I would pass the guards and depart. Five minutes or so after, the stove would explode, followed by the cans of black gunpowder, then the cartridges, and soon the room would become a raging furnace. No

one would suspect anything because the explosion of kerosene cooking-stoves is common in Soviet Russia. Manufactured under the Soviets, they are of extraordinarily inferior quality, and such explosions are the most frequent form of accident in Russian cities to-day.

Whether or not I had the moral right to slay Levin, seemed a clear and simple issue to me. He was a retainer of the oppressors of my country, who would murder unconcernedly my people, myself, my brother, and my son. That he was one of the 'professionals', did not absolve him from guilt in any way, nor did it involve the question of his objective being good or evil. With me there was no desire to avoid the issue: Levin was just a cog in the wheel of the gigantic Soviet human meat-grinder. If I destroyed 'butcher' Levin, I destroyed one of the cogs of this nefarious machine. Could anything have been simpler? Thus both the theoretical and applicable aspects of the plan appeared perfectly ethical and practicable to me, or, at least, so it seemed. To realise them, however, proved quite another matter.

I visited Levin five or six times, on each occasion assuring myself that now I would do it. Each time nothing happened. I simply could not lower myself to murder. I cursed my faintheartedness; I tried to reason that the lives of my son and myself hung in the balance against the life of a G.P.U. member (which seemed obvious without any dialectics), but to no avail. Evidently, premeditated murder was instinctively alien to me.

Few are those who, in our terrible times, have entirely escaped bloodshed of some kind. Homicide prevailed throughout the war, the Revolution, and under the autocratic conditions of the Soviet regime; but when confronted with the premeditated murder, even of a Chekist, or any other scoundrel, I turned away in horror from the deed. The very idea was revolting when Levin was offering me a cup of tea, or showing me his collection of arms. And so my sanguinary plan expired. The question of Raskolnikov about Napoleon and the 'trembling creature', remained unanswered.

I terminated the tormenting conflict within me by-joining a drinking party at the 'Dynamo' club one evening, getting drunk, and simply dismissing the fantasy from my mind for good and all. What a relief!

Then came an unexpected opportunity to obtain arms. I was sitting fishing, on the bank of the Vichka, about an hour's walk north of Camp, and grumbling at the ill-luck which attended my efforts.

Why, I protested to myself, are there so many not in need of food, and yet skilled and successful in the art of angling, while I, who need success for food for our escape, am such a failure? My dismal reflections were interrupted by a voice.

„Let me see your documents, Comrade.”

I turned. There was an armed guard standing at my shoulder. No one else was near; he was evidently asking to see the paper merely as a matter of form. My appearance, a bespectacled man, absorbed in the peaceful occupation of fishing, could not have aroused any suspicion. The guard, as if confirming my opinion, did everything in a slipshod manner; he put his rifle under his armpit, and held out his hand for the papers.

Like lightning, a plan, clear in every detail, flashed into my mind. I would thrust aside his bayonet with my left hand, and hit him with my right in the solar-plexus. Then I would throw his body into the river, and. . . . Just as I was about to act, a branch cracked nearby; I turned, and beheld a second soldier standing in the bushes with his rifle pointed at me. I gasped. Had I but heard this crackling a second later, I should have killed the first guard—and the second one would have shot me without compunction.

They casually inspected my documents and went their way. I tried to resume fishing, but I could not. My hands were trembling.

Thus, another of my schemes to obtain arms was frustrated.

## Some Technical Data

July 28, 1934, the date selected for our departure, approached as inevitably as a solar eclipse.

While at our first attempts there had been a sensation of some 'freedom of decision', of a possibility of postponement if anything went wrong, as in the instance when Yura became ill. Now there was none.

At twelve o'clock Boris would leave his Camp at Lodeinoe Pole on his way to the Finnish boundary.

At twelve we, too, must leave. Boris's disappearance would be immediately communicated to Medgora; „One of the Solonevich family has escaped, look out for the others.” This would lead to failure. On the other hand, if it happened that Yura and I were constrained to decamp one day earlier than Boris, a similar message would be sent from Medgora. So we had many misgivings. But nothing untoward occurred. All things proceeded smoothly. We were properly nourished, and were in fairly good physical condition. And we possessed a store of provisions in the cache in the woods.

It must not be forgotten that, on account of our Spartaciad engagements, we had been at liberty to inspect the adjoining territory. Such freedom was not conceded even to the so-called 'voluntary settlers' of Karelia. I was personally acquainted with all the guards, G.P.U. operatives, and all the other scoundrels. Nevertheless, I did not feel secure. Indeed, I lacked confidence. It all seemed so visionary.

One could not help remembering how, in the Leningrad prison, the G.P.U. investigator conducting my case had remarked with intended irony: „We keep guards on our frontiers in close contact and rule them with an iron hand. You were lucky that you were arrested on your journey. But for us, you would have been captured by the frontier guards, and those men—well, they don't like to take chances.” He went on with smiling contempt: „You are not a fool, Ivan Lukianovich, how could you have imagined that it

is so easy to leave Soviet Russia? You thought to desert us as though it were as easy as snapping your fingers. I can assure you it's far from being so simple. One man in a thousand might succeed—perhaps. . . .”

Later the Chief of the Operative Division, Comrade Podmokli, had intimated something equivalent to this. Podmokli was very drunk at the time and, telling me the story of the attempted escape of a group of engineers, he pursed his lips, which were dripping with liquid, with scorn: „Educated people, but what a funny lot of fools. Don't they know that we employ spies, spying over spies. . . ? Fools. . . . They carried provisions, too, in secret. . . . What did we care? Let them carry.”

And now, I, too, conveyed my provisions to the woods; evidently my practice was not original.

Was it possible then that, while Comrade Podmokli was pouring me a glass of vodka, and proposing a toast, „Let us have this, the last but one”, that he was smiling to himself, „Well, well, this time you are trying to escape for the very last time. Meanwhile you can continue to convey your provisions to the woods.”

Just before our escape, I was told a tragic story of three Russian priests who had tried to escape to Finland. On their way, two of them had died of starvation in the forests; the third, half-crazed from suffering, succeeded in dragging himself to some village where he 'surrendered'. He was immediately shot, without further ado.

Again there crossed my mind the story told me by a 'Basmach'—an Uzbek from Russian Turkestan, with whom I had broken ice last winter in Camp. The Uzbek was a man with a body as hard as bronze, his face was scarred with sabre cuts, his eyes gleamed with passionate hatred towards the Bolsheviks. Three years ago he had striven to escape; at that time, the penalty for this offence was more humane. The Uzbek lost himself in the labyrinth of forests, lakes, and streams, and was overtaken by the G.P.U., after he had crossed the Finnish border.

All that I had gathered from the G.P.U. and others about attempted escapes was exceedingly discouraging. However, there was another aspect to be considered: People recall the abortive attempts, but they very rarely mention those that succeed. Only later, when I, myself, was in Finland, did I discover how very few succeeded in escaping. Throughout 1934, no one save ourselves had crossed the Finnish border.

In the spring a partly-decomposed corpse was found in Finland near the frontier, evidently that of a man who had crossed over, but had succumbed before he could reach a village. Who knows how many more such dead bodies lie decaying in the Karelian taiga?

I now thought that all the plans for our escape were complete to the minutest detail. Previous to my earlier attempts, I had made a survey of the Persian border on both sides of the Caspian Sea, of the Polish frontier at Minsk, the Latvian border at Pskov, and, finally, the Finnish border in Karelia.

Twice before we had done everything to insure success, and twice had we failed! This time it appeared that everything was in perfect readiness. The smallest details were arranged. We had thought of a plan or an alibi for every conceivable difficulty that might arise. In fact, from the viewpoint of logic, all was prepared.

But what if my logic proved less sound than that of the G.P.U.? What if all our artifices were mere child's play, under the 'never sleeping eyes' of the G.P.U.? What if the G.P.U., in some manner entirely unknown to me, was in complete possession of all our plans? Our correspondence with Boris, our cache in the woods—how Yura had abstracted the compass from the Camp Technicum, and how I had formed abortive schemes to despatch Levin and thus obtain arms? Was the cat only watching the mice play before springing?

All this is now ancient history, but at that time failure to escape meant something more galling than death itself. Every man nurses his little vanity: that our proceedings were familiar to the G.P.U., would have indicated that I



was a complete fool; that I had been outwitted and duped like an imbecile, with the tragic consequence that we three would have been unceremoniously shut in a G.P.U. cellar.

The mere thought of this contingency drove me to distraction. I tried to reason with myself, knowing that now both Yura and I were well-prepared; that in no case would we submit to being thrust into any dungeon; but we had made similar preparations in the previous year, and yet we had been drugged, disarmed, and taken. That fellow Babenko, it is true, had penetrated our secret. But he was an expert spy. In Saltykovka we had made him insensible with drink and searched everything he possessed. We had found nothing that could strengthen our suspicions—yet we continued sceptical. At present, there was little to suspect. Nevertheless, we seemed surrounded by some sinister and unseen influence that was about to entrap me and ruin our scheme. Call it hallucination, if you like, but I dreaded the wiles of the G.P.U. I retained this fear despite the fact that I was familiar with their treacherous devices. For eighteen years I had striven to evade their influence, and my subsequent success is proved by the circumstance that I am compiling this book in Finland instead of being relegated to the Far Beyond— so I did not do so badly after all.

I deem the G.P.U. technique somewhat inferior; certainly, it succeeds only when applied to thoughtless people. The most humiliating consideration is, that their technique is fully efficacious with Russian conspirators. When any Russian officer is drunk, even one who is dauntlessly brave and ready to risk his life, he then falls easily into their clutches. Briefly, the G.P.U. technique is not of very superior quality, but it proves very successful when applied to those who display the mentality of sheep.

The fact that in our earlier endeavours we ourselves had played the part of sheep is little to our credit, nor to that of the G.P.U. I had consumed many bottles of vodka with numerous G.P.U. men in order to learn this device. When intoxicated, all of them alternately vaunted and shed tears. They boasted of the omniscience of the G.P.U., and then wept that under it they were not allowed to live. One has to be fair even to one's foes. The existence

of an average G.P.U. official is utterly demoralising—the life of a man who has bartered his soul to the devil. Mephistopheles at least gave something to Faust; the G.P.U. gives nothing, yet it is ever-ready to remind one of the fatal compact.

I realise that it may seem fantastic and incredible, but twice in my life I succeeded in extricating a Communist from the clutches of the G.P.U. One of them had been forced to work for the G.P.U. for ten years. Well as I knew the circumventing cunning of the G.P.U., yet, during the days that preceded our escape, all my knowledge of their methods seemed to be clouded by an irresistible dread. Our thoughts were concentrated on our coming release. Still, neither Yura nor I spoke of the project. We reclined on the grass of the river banks, warmed ourselves in the sunshine, and read Wordsworth. Yura was pervaded with the atmosphere of Fenimore Cooper, and constantly endeavoured to make me realise the wonder and beauty that awaited us in the forests when we reached them.

Yura lived in clover during those remaining months in Camp. He had made quite a group of friends among the Vichka youths. He played chess, volleyball, trained for swimming, resolved to establish a Russian record for one hundred metres, ate triple rations, and slept like a log on the bare boards of our barrack. His youthful tones, springtime, and all that never repeats itself in mundane life, found expression when he said to me: „Don't you think, Dad, that, after all, it's not so bad this life in a Concentration Camp?"

At that moment we were stretched on the turf on the bank of the Vichka River, resting after a short swim, followed by a brief tussle under the bright July sky. At these words I dropped the book that I had been reading and looked at him. To my surprise he was not even abashed by his remark. Evidently it was just a boylike exhibition of the joy of living.

I asked him simply whom he could name that lived as we did, in our Camp. Yura admitted that no one else did, not even Uspensky. Uspensky worked like a horse, while we relaxed.

„Well, Dad, I didn't say that we needn't run away. Certainly, we must. On the other hand, it's really not so bad here, now is it?”

„Have you forgotten our experiences at Podporozhie Camp? Have you forgotten the terrible fate of Professor Avdeyev?”

Yura wilted. Yet, his suggestion made me the victim of a seductive suggestion for several hours.

Was there really any serious reason for our departure? Here, in Camp I could remain living in fair conformity with my requirements, and these were simple ones. I was certain that I could successfully conduct the Spartaciad, and later I might place the hunting party under personal supervision. (There was one of these at the Camp for privileged prisoners, whose duty was to procure woodcocks and bear provender for the G.P.U. larders.) I might arrange to secure Yura a permit to return to Moscow, instead of permitting him to take the terrible risk of exposing his curly head to a possible G.P.U. automatic. I could advise Boris of the change in our plans. Uspensky, of course, would manage Boris's transfer, to our Camp. How fine it would be to hunt with Boris again! Was escape really worth the risk?

There were several hours of indecision and faint-heartedness, but they passed away. We continued our preparations.

What arrangements had we made? We had already procured everything that we could conceivably need on the journey. Food, medicines, clothing, shoes, compasses, etc. We obtained all these supplies through cajolery and subterfuge. Yura simply removed the two compasses from the Camp Technicum.

But we were driven to depart unarmed. I consoled myself with the thought that it was hardly probable that we would encounter trouble in the Karelian taiga. Later we met with one such 'hardly probable' experience.

Leaving the Camp was not an easy matter. It was difficult to arrange our joint departure, and particularly for each to travel in a southerly direction.

What was still more difficult was the carrying of part of our belongings with us. Also, we had to arrange the matter in such a way that our absence would not be observed for some little time. All in all, it was a complex problem, but, after a little scheming, I obtained several official passes, namely: (1) for a trip to the White Sea in the North, available for a fortnight; (2) for Yura to proceed in a northerly direction as a swimming instructor, good for five days; (3) for my visit to Camp No. 5 in the South, covering three days; and (4) for Yura—a pass for fishing, also towards the South, extending over three days. Our cache was situated to the South of Medgora.

I was convinced from previous experience that our last days in Camp would prove a period of intense nervous strain to me. I should be afflicted with acute insomnia, and a constant fear that I had forgotten something; that I had neglected a necessary precaution; that something had been overlooked that would cost us our lives.

I was mistaken, however, for I continued completely calm and slept in peace. Only once, on the occasion when I applied for my complicated permits, did it seem to me that I detected a sarcastic smile on the face of the Chief of Personnel. However, we needed those permits. If we were unsuspected, our permits would guarantee at least five days of respite from pursuit. They would also help Boris, in case he was unable to leave Camp on the prearranged date. These would give him five days of respite. For five to seven days, no one would ask for us. We should be well on our way by that time.

I had every reason to assume that when Uspensky received the news of our escape, and realised that, with all the elaborate publicity programme of the Spartaciad, the innumerable articles in the Moscow Press, the telegrams to the Press agencies, the coming of the moving-picture men from Moscow to Medgora, nothing whatever would come of his undertaking, he would rave with fury and disappointment. That he, Uspensky, the so-called 'Napoleon of the Solovetsky Islands', should be made to appear so ridiculous! It would not be an ordinary case of escape. I would gladly have paid a considerable percentage of my royalties for one brief glance at Uspensky's face when he

learned that the entire Solonevich family had fled, and that their trail was already cold.

I slumbered like a log on the eve of our flight; probably because I was completely satisfied that our attempt was unavoidable. There was no possibility of evasion now. We had crossed the Rubicon.

At dawn, while I was still half-asleep, Yura roused me. He was ready, with the knapsack on his shoulders containing various possessions which we could throw away later. Some of the people in the barrack were near us.

„Well, Dad, I’m going.”

According to his orders, Yura was ostensibly to take an autobus going North. I gazed up over the blanket.

„All right. Don’t forget to see the Chief of the Povenets Camp. He has the list of the swimming team. But don’t waste too much time there.”

„I won’t. If anything important occurs. I’ll ’phone you.” „I’ll be gone; you had better call Uspensky direct.”

„All right. Well, *au revoir*.”

„Auf Wiedersehen!”

Yura’s tall figure disappeared through the door. My heart beat painfully. Who knew? Perhaps I had seen him for the last time ?

## We Leave the Camp

Yura had to leave the Camp shortly before nine o’clock, since the bus journeying North left at nine. Instead of boarding it, he was to hide his

make-believe knapsack at a selected spot, obtain fishing rods from another place, and continue on foot southwards to our destination.

I was to leave the barrack at twelve o'clock, at which time the train left for the North, and, taking with me some of our provisions, started to walk to the cache.

So far, so good; but disturbing thoughts were uppermost in my mind. Suppose there were an ambush already at the cache? Suppose that Yura had been detained on his way by some too active operative?

I climbed down from my bunk. The overseer of the barrack, a former Communist and, at that time a voluntary spy among the prisoners, who might be described as a 'born fool', asked me casually:

„So, Comrade, you are going to the White Sea?”

„Yes, to Murmansk, and back.”

„Well, have a pleasant journey.”

Again I imagined a hidden irony in the farewell. I took a tea kettle, poured myself a mug of boiling water, and after a time, replied:

„Not much pleasure in sucfra[?] journey. I shall have plenty of work to do there.”

„At least you will see some new people.” Then, changing the subject abruptly, „Your son is a fine boy. You'd better take care that this Camp trash doesn't spoil him. That would be a pity. However, Uspensky is your friend, he will probably arrange for Yura's reprieve pretty soon.”

I sipped my boiling water and carefully noted the expression on his stolid face from a corner of my eye. No, there was no look of suspicion. He had mentioned Yura simply to make himself agreeable to a man who was a 'friend' of Uspensky himself.

I could not get rid of intruding forebodings and feared that somewhere in the private office of the G.P.U., some operative in possession of our secret, was granting us sufficient time to hang ourselves.

Perhaps, when I had been getting my passes, ordering me to go both North and South, he had telephoned, „O.K., write the passes, let him go”, and then ordered an ambush at our cache.

To overcome this apprehension, and to throw the imaginary operative off the scent even more, I wrote two short articles about the Spartaciad for the Camp newspaper, carried them to the editor, Smirnov, had a chat with him, accepted some commissions for purchases in Murmansk, and, quite unexpectedly, was given an advance of 35 roubles for them. That was the last Soviet money that I ever received. I spent it immediately, purchasing two kilograms of sugar and three packages of ‘makhorka’. That left me 50 kopeks.

When I left the editor’s office, I discovered, to my intense dismay, that it was still an hour and a half to noon. I had walked to the office, chatted with the editor, received the money, and yet the time had passed more slowly than I had believed possible. I felt that I could scarcely wait any longer.

I returned to the barrack which was then almost deserted. Climbing up to my bunk, where I was safe from observation, I crammed food and other belongings into my knapsack, although it was soon evident that there was more than I had supposed. To further my pretence, I took with me a basketball net, a football, and some sporting pamphlets. On top I placed one with a picture of a football player on the cover, familiar to any illiterate guard, who would thus know the nature of the books, and, as a finishing touch, took two sport javelins along. Then, prepared for any emergency, I went to the door.

After all, there was no real reason to suppose that, on my leaving the barrack, anyone would search my baggage, although the rules required that this should be conducted either by the overseer-prisoner or the orderly. If my suspicions were unwarranted, there would be no search; no one, on his

own initiative, would dare to search me. My influence with Uspensky was too well known for that. If any mysterious authority knew, I should be taken at our cache.

I went through the door with trepidation. The overseer wished me *bon voyage* again, the orderly followed suit, and then looked at me anxiously.

„What a pity you are going to-day.”

I surmised a friendly, hidden warning—I drew a deep breath. He continued:

„I got a letter from my wife. I'd like you to write an answer for me. Well, when you come back I shall remind you. Yura, you say? No, he is too young, no reason to let him know about such things.”

I drew a long breath of relief, and passed on. When I had climbed the hill, I looked back for the last time on the dismal scene. Our barrack looked like a tilted coffin, its roof patched, the holes in the windows patched with paper. On the bench at the door sat a prisoner, his head drooping.

Paradoxically enough, I felt a kind of regret. After all, we had not fared so badly there. Also, the Camp contained so many really fine Russian people. From a distance, even my hard bunk now seemed to have been fairly comfortable. The future, at best, forecasted forests, swamps, nights in the cold Karelian rain. No, I am not at heart a wanderer.

It was a hot July day. Passing along the streets of Medgora, full of deep sand, I scanned the market-place, and kept a sharp look-out in order to avoid familiar faces in time.

Several times I looked back, lighted a cigarette, stared at the placards and Camp newspaper pasted on the wall (subscriptions were not taken, due to lack of paper). I wanted to be sure that there was no one trailing me.

There was no one. I knew that as a result of former experiences. I passed the armed guards posted at the gates of the Camp. They did not challenge me, and then I reached the railroad tracks.



The first six kilometres of our itinerary followed the tracks; that was one of our measures of precaution, fortunately. I had found out, while drinking with some members of the 'Dynamo', that blood-hounds were of no avail along railroad tracks as the fire-boxes of the engines destroyed the scent the animals follow. We could not afford to overlook this fact.

Travelling is hard when one is overloaded. I carried no less than a hundred and fifty pounds' weight. The kilometre poles succeeded each other. Here I saw a familiar turn; there I crossed a bridge over a stream leaping over a gravelly bed; at last I came to a telegraph pole numbered 27/511. This was the place where a kind of narrow footpath led into the forest, and served as a short-cut to Camp Five. I looked round cautiously, and, seeing no one, dived into the bushes and came out on the path.

This wound among rocks and around stumps. I perspired profusely under my heavy load. Just before the last turn, when I had to plunge into the jungle itself, I saw two armed guards on the path coming toward me. I had a moment of deadly terror. Did it mean that they were awaiting me?

Humiliation overwhelmed me. They were cleverer than I. What should I do now? They were no more than fifty paces away. My mind was in a turmoil. Should I take the risk and plunge into the jungle?

How about Yura? Should I start a fight. There were only two of them, but why only two? If they had been specially commissioned to hunt me down, there would have been more—ten at least. The distance between us decreased. Now, I should have to meet them. If only I had not had the knapsack on my shoulders to encumber my movements! Perhaps I could seize one of them and, using him as a shield, leap on the other, and throw both of them to the ground. Once on the ground, their rifles would be useless. My skill in jiu-jitsu would come to my rescue—how many times it had done so before! However, it was too late to turn; I had to go straight ahead—there were no more than ten steps—My heart beat a mad tattoo. Apparently, however, my bearing betrayed nothing, except that my face was covered with sweat.

One of the patrols greeted me with a salute, and grinned, „Rather hot, Comrade Solonevich. Why didn't you take the train?”

Was he mocking me?

„Economy's sake, you know. Saving ticket money.” „Well, that always helps. Five roubles saved means half a litre of vodka. Going to Camp Five?”

„Yes.”

I watched them narrowly: just simple Russian faces. Nothing could be hidden on such open countenances. After all, there was really nothing suspicious. Probably both of these fellows had seen me several times arm-in-arm with Comrade Podmokli after our drinking carousals. They had seen me in front of the G.P.U. operatives, selecting the crew for the Spartaciad. They undoubtedly knew of my great 'khaltura' plan.

„Well, have a good trip.” The guard saluted me again. I replied with a similar gesture, being bareheaded, and the patrol proceeded on its way. The sounds of their steps grew fainter. I stopped and listened. Nothing broke the silence. They had really gone on: the danger was over.

I laid my load on the ground and leant on a rock. Wiping my forehead, I listened again. No sound came to my ears save the rapid beating of my heart which, it seemed to me, could be heard in Medgora.

Finally I turned into the bushes of the jungle where no patrolling was possible, and where nothing could be seen beyond ten or twenty paces.

Our cache was only half a kilometre farther on. I was approaching it when, to my horror, I heard an indistinct murmur, something like a song. Was it Yura who had started singing, like a fool? What the deuce was it? I crept towards the slight slope on all fours. At its bottom, in the midst of a tangle of thickly-grown bushes, our treasured food supplies were hidden. There Yura was to have waited for me.

Something bronze-coloured flashed in the thicket. It looked like Yura's back. Could he conceivably be taking a sun-bath? And singing on top of it? Good Heavens, what a fool! He would certainly hear about it from me!

Suddenly something like the hissing of a snake came to my ears, then Yura's spectacles appeared.

He was making gestures to me to crawl down. I crawled.

The bushes were so dense that from outside nothing could be seen.

„Peasants,” he whispered, „mowing, I believe. Let's pack quickly and move on.”

By now the voices had become more distinct. The people were about twenty or thirty paces from our bushes. Their vari-coloured shirts flashed between the trees. It was high time for us to pack and disappear. I hid the football, javelins, and pamphlets under the moss in the hole from which I dug our supplies. We had previously sprinkled the top of our cache with tobacco, lest some straying, hungry dog be tempted by the tantalising smell of 'Torgsin' bacon and sausage. In feverish and silent haste, we crammed our knapsacks with supplies. When I put my sack across my shoulders, I was once more seriously overloaded. But that was of little consequence at the moment.

We crept through the thicket over the grass, among weeds and thickets, down to the bed of an almost dry streamlet; then along its bed. At last we crawled behind a small ridge which completely hid us from the eyes of the unknown intruders. Here we stood and listened. Under the strain our nerves played tricks on us, prompting us to believe that we heard shouts of alarm as if we had been observed.

„Let's hurry,” said Yura.

We did hurry. According to our itinerary we had to climb over a stone ridge about five kilometres from the railroad tracks, then across a narrow water-course, connecting a chain of lakes adjoining the ridge.

We walked, crawled, climbed. Perspiration ran down our spectacles. We gasped for breath, yet we kept on. The ridge was the most dangerous obstacle. Its watershed was bare in consequence of the arctic winds, and it was patrolled; not often, but at times. During my preliminary survey, however, I had discovered a shallow ravine which crossed the ridge. Now we slipped into it cautiously, listening intently to every sound.

Next we had to climb another ridge, covered with wind-felled trees; and then descend a dangerously steep slope to the lake, avoiding scattered boulders covered with damp, slippery moss.

This section was the most perilous part of the journey. It was difficult to avoid collision with a boulder with a sprained ankle, if no worse. Then we would have been compelled to rest for some time. Without food this would have meant disaster. That was why we had accumulated a heavy stock of provisions.

About five o'clock we reached the lake, found our chosen watercourse, crossed it, and at last breathed more freely. I must mention that, before climbing the first ridge, we had smeared the soles of our boots with some strong-smelling stuff, so as to leave no scent for the blood-hounds.

When we had traversed the stream, we sat down for a brief rest. While loitering, we discussed the presence of the peasants near our cache, and concluded that, if they had noticed us and had felt any malice, they would either have run to the railroad tracks to report the sight of two suspicious persons to the authorities, or would have pursued us. In neither case would they have gone on working, merely shouting to one another.

We then confronted the fact that we had burned the bridges behind us. We were at last on the way to freedom. Our departure had gone smoothly; nobody had evinced the slightest suspicion. The time limit of our passes permitted us to assume that no alarm would be raised for five days at least. My absence might be discovered earlier, if Uspensky, for some unforeseen reason, sent an inquiry to me at Murmansk, and so learned that I had not been seen there. This was hardly probable, however; and even less so when

it was known that I was expected to call on five different Camps on the way. No one would pay much attention to the absence of Yura, even after the limit of his pass had expired. We could, therefore, really count on seven days. In that time we should be a hundred kilometres from the Camp as the crow flies. Of course, actually, we had a greater distance to cover, for we had to allow for detours. Nevertheless, we were content. At last we had sprung the trap. Behind us lay the spying eyes of the G.P.U. In front was liberty!

However, we were still too near to Camp. Tired as we were, we tramped westward for about an hour more, and reached a deep and wide ravine. At the bottom of this, a small brook ran. We threw off our knapsacks, much relieved. In a moment Yura had undressed and dived into a hole in the stream where he started to splash. Covered with sweat and dirt, I followed him.

Suddenly he screamed. „Why, Dad, what is the matter with you? Turn round.”

I turned my back to him.

„Great Heavens! How could you avoid noticing it? Your whole back is one great sore!”

I felt it. My hand came away smeared with blood. The skin on both sides of the backbone was deeply torn, but I had experienced no pain at any time.

Yura bustled round reproachfully. He bathed the wound, painted it with iodine, and bandaged it.

We were abundantly provided with medical appliances which we had obtained surreptitiously. When I examined the knapsack, I discovered that I had contrived to place a side of bacon in such a way that the sharp edge of its uncut, thick skin had rubbed my back incessantly with each step taken. In the excitement of flight I had felt nothing; even now it seemed a trifle, scarcely worth mentioning.

We made a fire, using the driest twigs to lessen smoke. In a pot filled with water and buckwheat, we cooked porridge—a staple dish of the Northern Russians. To this we added a generous portion of bacon.

Then we made a thorough inventory of our luggage. Unhesitatingly we threw away everything we could spare—but still over two hundred and fifty pounds of dead weight remained.

Yura dipped his spoon with delight into the porridge.

„You know, Dad, by God, here it’s really not so bad.”

He gave himself up to full enjoyment of the situation. I, too, felt cheerfully inclined.

When he had eaten his fill, Yura threw himself down and gazed up at the bright summer sky. I started to follow suit, but, with a groan, I twisted over on my stomach. My back felt as if someone had put a red-hot iron on it. I cursed. How should I be able to carry my knapsack?

After we had rested a while, I rearranged my load in such a way that the bottom of it did not reach my loins, but still it slipped round badly. The weight of one hundred and fifty pounds was mostly on my neck, poorly balanced, with its centre of gravity too high. Stepping over boulders became somewhat like walking a tight rope.

We made one kilometre more, and then rested for the night amidst a group of thick bushes on top of a hill. There we spread one raincoat on the ground, and, covering ourselves with the other, we put mosquito nets over our heads, and lay down. After a day of hard tramping and so much excitement, we anticipated a nice, refreshing sleep.

We were disillusioned.

Millions of mosquitoes, varying in size but of similar tormenting disposition, enveloped us in a dense cloud. These tiny tormentors penetrated every microscopic fold of our clothing, crawled into our noses and ears, and their million buzzings blended together in a horrible discord. All night long it

seemed to me that one could not live, move, or sleep under such conditions, and yet, after a few days, we did not even notice them. A human creature can grow accustomed to almost anything, yet, when we reached Finland our faces were swollen like lumps of freshly-risen dough. So our first night passed in agony.

Before dawn we lost any hope of sleep, so we took up our knapsacks and started away in the grey mist that precedes sunrise. The grass was wet with dew and, after walking a few minutes, we discovered another handicap. Our trousers had become soaked through, and stuck to our legs at every step. We changed to shorts.

Worn out and unrefreshed, we trudged wearily down the slope of the hill, came to a swamp hidden in the morning mist, and crossed it, sinking in the slime up to our hips.

At last the sun arose, dispersing the fog, and driving the mosquitoes to cover. Down below us we saw a tiny lake. The surroundings were so serene that it was difficult to realise that anywhere on the globe such eyesores as Concentration Camps existed.

„Just the right time to take a nap,” said Yura.

Once more we crept into some bushes and spread our raincoats. Yura gave me the same kind of exultant expression that Columbus must have worn when he discovered America.

„Hurry, Dad, it seems we have really escaped!”

„Don’t count your chickens before they are hatched, Yura,” I replied, „we are not through the woods yet.”

„We shall get through! We shall succeed! Isn’t life wonderful?” And then with a sigh, „If we only had a shot-gun apiece and a couple of automatics, what a time we could have.”

## Our Schedule

Each morning we awoke before sunrise, made tea, and walked until eleven o'clock. Then we rested, boiled our buckwheat porridge, and when the fire was extinguished, covered a mile or two more.

Then we took our siesta. We never went to sleep at the same place where we had built our fire. The smoke and flame of the fire might have attracted the attention of some straying Activist, or Urk on the run, who was looking for something to eat and, last but not least, some local peasant who might betray us for the customary reward of a sack of flour. To be caught while sleeping near the fire would have been preposterous.

We awoke about five, and resumed our march until darkness set in. After our evening meal we went to sleep. The night rests were the worst. No matter how close we tried to press together, with everything we had wrapped around us, the damp cold of sub-arctic nights pierced us to the bone. Later we contrived an improvement in our beds. We cut long strips of moss and used them as blankets.

Hordes of every imaginable species of insects crawled into every crevice of our clothing, but at least we kept warm.

We soon discovered that our crude map was woefully inadequate for our needs. Rivers, marked on the map, ran in contrary courses when we found them, according more with the laws of Nature than with Soviet cartographical institutions. This particular region, however, was poorly mapped generally.

For our first attempt to escape in 1932, I had had three different maps, scaling three kilometres to the inch. While they had coincided in general outline, even the course of the rather prominent River Soona had differed on each.



We did not let this perturb us, however, but proceeded according to the principle of Jack London's hero, „Whatever happens, go West.”

One of us kept well in front, regulating our direction by the sun or compass, while the other brought up the rear, and was responsible for any adjustment of small detours. There were many of these meanderings. Sometimes, in the labyrinth of lakes, swamps, and water-courses, we were forced to take the most complicated loops, and only with the greatest difficulty did we regain the original direction of our route. However, our arduous endeavours were rewarded. Either as a result of the great care expended, or perhaps, in spite of it, after sixteen days of wandering through the taiga, we arrived at the exact point of our destination which we had previously scheduled.

A mistaken estimate of twenty or thirty kilometres either South or North, would have proved a very costly error. To the South the Finnish boundary makes a bend so that if, after crossing the line, we had gone West, we should have incurred the risk of entering Soviet territory once more, and then recrossing the frontier. If, after all, we had made the crossing twice, it would have been tempting Providence just a shade too much.

North of us a strategical highway touched the border. Here was a large village, Porozero, which was the headquarters of nearly a regiment of the frontier guards. This was certainly not a spot to visit.

Day after day passed. We proceeded slowly. There was no need to hurry, as we were beyond any search from Medgora, and besides it was advisable to preserve our strength. In a case of alarm or danger, it would have been fatal to us had our pursuers found us in an exhausted state. Then, again, our heavy knapsacks made faster movement an impossibility.

The wound on my back soon became far more painful than I had expected. Try as I might to adjust the load, it slipped down repeatedly, and irritated the healing wound. At last, after long discussion, I was driven to pack part of my load into Yura's sack. This gave him more than a hundred pounds to carry, and it was all he could do to raise his feet.

## Crossings

Hour after hour, day after day, we continued our tiresome journey; scrambling up a mountain-side through forests and tangled undergrowth, finally reaching the ridge above a region of fallen trees and scattered boulders, only to make an equally difficult descent to a lake or marsh, which must somehow be traversed. Then on to another dangerous and fatiguing ascent, descent, and swamp, the mournful Karelian landscape ever confronting us. Descending from the forest would invariably bring us to a rust-coloured swamp stretching from North-west to South-east, the general direction of the Karelian ranges.

In morning mist and in evening twilight we stubbornly struggled through the bogs, sometimes sinking to our hips in slime, sometimes leaping from place to place. Then one of us would slip and have to be rescued from a treacherous opening, and we thought of Boris, making the same trying and dangerous adventure alone.

During daylight we usually skirted the swamps, as we could be too plainly seen on their exposed surfaces. But sometimes, even in broad daylight, when the swamp was extensive and it seemed that encircling it would delay us too greatly, we would merely nod to one another and push straight through it, throwing ourselves in simple faith on the mercy of St. Nicholas, patron saint and protector of all Russians.

This meant the necessity of covering a half to three-quarter miles with the utmost speed, so as not to risk remaining too long in the open. On we went, floundering in the mire, sinking to the waist, walking bent double to the ground, using every branch or bush for cover. We would always reach the other side breathless and exhausted. These were among the most perilous periods of our journey.

Equally dangerous and difficult were the river crossings. We came to the first river late one evening. For about an hour we stumbled through a

shelter of reeds taller than an average man, coming out eventually at the very edge of the stream. It was about twenty-five yards wide and flowed slowly and smoothly. We looked for a fording place, but even the bank was boggy, and the river bed itself looked like slippery mud. We later discovered that the bank was not earth at all, but a thick deposit of dead reeds, roots, and rotten herbage, a peat bog in the making.

We travelled along the river about a mile to the South in our search for a ford, and at last decided to swim it. We gathered branches and tied together a sort of makeshift raft, with rope we carried for such emergencies. After loading part of our luggage on the raft, I undressed. At once myriads of mosquitoes attacked me. The water was icy cold, the rickety raft scarcely remained on the surface, and I had to make six journeys to transfer our luggage to the opposite shore. It was dark when I finished, and I was chilled to the bone and utterly wretched. Yura swam across, cold and miserable. We collected our luggage and groped our way through the darkness, in search of a dry place to sleep.

But there was no dry spot to be found. The swamp, reeds, holes full of slime, apparently stretched without limit. We came across several pools, called in Russian, 'windows', actually bottomless crevices in the sod cover.

To stop meant dangerous exposure. To proceed implied great risk of accident. There was nothing with which to make a fire and apparently no place to prepare one. Ultimately, we came to a little mound enveloped in fog and darkness. Here we sat down and made a small fire. The night was full of dismal noises. Wild ducks quacked in the swamps, the wind rustled in the tree-tops, from the distance sounded weird hoots and calls, but no human voices were distinguishable in this vast Karelian wilderness.

The fog poured into our camping-place, shrouding the nearer trees. It seemed as if we were completely and hopelessly stranded in this wilderness. I could see ourselves with the mind's eye ceaselessly tramping, floundering, scrambling, through the labyrinth of brackish water, fog, phantom woodlands, and sodden river banks, numb with cold, never to find an exit! The forest seemed fantastic.

Lean against this withered birch and it falls; it has been rotten for many years. A fallen tree trunk of enormous size lies across one's path. Step on it and it collapses, a mouldered mass!

We cut some fir branches, and spread them on the wet ground to make a kind of mat. Our fire burned itself out. The fog and darkness crept closer. Lying down with our bodies close together for warmth, we slept only to be intermittently aroused by the fear of approaching danger.

Altogether we crossed eight rivers. One crossing only was amusing. For the first time I saw Yura frightened. We had come to a small forest stream. The bottom was covered with pine needles, turned jet black, the water itself perfectly clear. The low banks were dry, covered with a growth of alder. To avoid fording the stream unclothed, we looked for a narrow place to cross.

Our search led us to where a pine trunk had fallen across the stream. It sagged in the middle where the water passed over it and made it slippery. Yura boldly stepped onto the log and started to walk over.

„Better take a pole to lean on.”

„Never mind. I'll be all right.”

Reaching the middle, Yura suddenly made balancing motions with arms and body, then appeared like one in a trance. I saw his face turn ghastly pale, and he clenched his jaws as if facing danger. Yet there was no one near and, besides, he was glancing down at the stream. The water was transparent and there was nothing to cause fear. At last he said in a muffled voice: „Give me a pole.” I passed him a stick and without looking back, he grasped the end of it, put it down, leaned on it, and returned to the bank. He was still pale and perspiration streamed down his face.

„What's the matter with you?” I demanded.

„It's too slippery,” he replied in a lifeless tone.

I burst into laughter. Yura looked at me indignantly. What was so amusing?

Then a faint smile appeared on his face.

„My word, I was scared!”

„Why?”

„What do you mean, why? If I had slipped into the water, it would have seen the end of our sugar!”

The next crossing proved to be much less hilarious.

In the early morning we came to a high, steep river bank. On the opposite side another steep incline could be seen through gaps in the mist. We searched for about two hours for a more convenient place for crossing, but the river became wider and wider, and finally spread out into a lake nearly two miles broad and perhaps three miles in length. At the extremity of the lake we saw a church, several other buildings, and, worst of all, a bridge. A bridge probably meant a frontier-post. That direction was closed for us.

We retraced our steps. After three hours more of walking, during which we covered no more than four miles, we decided to lie down and rest. Yura fell asleep. I became drowsy also, but from the South the sound of Karelian cowbells reached my ears. I got up. The sound seemed to come from far away, but suddenly, no more than twenty paces away, a herd of cattle appeared. We grabbed up our knapsacks and broke into a run. We heard the cowherd shouting behind us. Whether for our ears or the cows' we didn't know. We changed our direction. Again we heard the wooden bells and woodmen's axes. Our situation looked bad. There was only one thing to do, skirt the village and the bridge by making a wide detour.

After three or four hours of steady travelling we reached the edge of the forest. Yura put down his knapsack and crawled forward to reconnoitre. Coming back he reported . . . a highway. I went to have a look. Yes, it was one of the brand-new strategic highways that the Bolsheviki have constructed towards the Finnish frontier.

Nothing to do but to take a chance and sprint across it. We made a bold dash to the other side. A telegraph pole nearby tempted us to stop and have a look at the sign. Perhaps we were already in Finland!

We approached the pole, but alas, the sign was in Russian. I heard a frantic shout, „Halt!”

I got a mere glimpse of a human form which had evidently come out of the forest forty or fifty paces from us. The shape snatched from somewhere what resembled an automatic pistol. We did not wait to get a better view of it. Two or three shots cracked behind us, the reports somewhat muffled by the sound of our running feet. Perhaps bullets were ‘whistling around us’, but we didn’t stop. We were running at full speed. I stumbled over a root, fell, and while getting up heard a bellowed, „Halt!” Did they expect us to stop?

We kept on running for some distance and then stopped to talk over our next move. Our situation was alarming. We were not far from the village whence we had been discovered. Undoubtedly there was a frontier-post there, and bloodhounds, of course. The dogs would immediately be put on our trail and a general round-up ordered. In the ‘Dynamo’ I had learned in detail how this was done.

The shoutings of the phantom shape had already been answered by voices from the village, and the barking of dogs. We started to run again, having, of course, not the slightest idea what was ahead of us in either distance or hazard. I am a very poor distance runner, a mile on a track being really an exhausting trial for me. But run we did, with heavy loads, over a crazy chaos of stones, stumps, holes, and fallen trees. We did stop three times, but not to rest. The first time we smeared the soles of our boots with lard, the next with tobacco juice especially prepared and carried for the purpose, and the third time we used ammonia. Even a genius of the canine family could hardly suspect any relation between that first tantalising aroma of pig fat, the stench of tobacco juice, and the acrid fumes of ammonia.

In spite of our forced run, an obstacle race which could truthfully be described as of Marathon magnitude, nothing terrible happened. No failing of the heart or other accident. Indeed, the human being is 'fearfully and wonderfully made' and can accomplish, under stress, astounding feats.

But we ran into a trap. A lake stopped us, its eastern side being a broad expanse of exposed swamp.

We turned back for a short distance, climbed a small hill, and put down our sacks. Yura looked at his watch.

„We have been running for three hours! I can't believe it.”

The barking of dogs came from somewhere in the direction of the highway. It sounded like quite a pack. Three shots banged, one a crisp rifle shot, two the heavy roar of shot-guns. These various delightful sounds came from points over a space which seemed to extend from the lake to the end of the swamp. It seemed that all the village dogs—the G.P.U. hounds do not bark—as well as the Komsomols', had been mobilised for our capture. We meant nothing to them, but as soon as they entered the forest, they would become possessed with the hunting instinct and passionately pursue their human prey.

We were cut off on three sides. On one side by a chain of lakes, on another by the hunters, and on the third by the pool and its neighbouring swamp. There was no alternative but to set out North-east in the hope of discovering an exit, an isthmus, or perhaps a narrow water-course between two lakes.

We started. I dragged my heavy limbs and heartily cursed myself for my hesitancy and reluctance at Medgora: I should have broken Levin's neck and annexed his weapons. If we had possessed a couple of shot-guns and a pair of automatics, we could have shown these Komsomoltsi what a man hunt might become. They would have had cause to remember it!

I do not profess to be a good shot, and Yura is no expert, but it is one thing to be a crack marksman, and quite another to fight with one's back to the

wall. Had we been armed, I might not have acquitted myself too well, but Yura—well, one had better avoid Yura on such occasions. Oh, yes— we could have shown them, had we carried guns.

Darkness now descended. Again we were stopped by a lake, and had to skirt the shore for nearly two miles. My legs refused their office; my knapsack again slid down and lacerated my back. Ahead of us the lake spread its smooth surface now scarcely visible in the deepening darkness.

The hunting party was coming nearer. The barking of the dogs and occasional shots became more and more distinct. At last we dragged ourselves to a place where the lake, or was it a channel now, slightly narrowed, and the distance across to the other shore seemed to be no more than half a mile.

We decided to swim for it. We went down to the water's edge, and made from anything within reach an improvised raft to float our knapsacks. Meanwhile it became intensely dark. We removed our clothes and descended into the water. The mosquitoes immediately assailed us, as they usually did at every crossing. At first we waded in the shallow, slimy water, our feet sinking into the oozy bottom. When the water was waist deep we began to swim. We had scarcely swum fifteen yards when he heard the regular 'put-put' of a gasoline motor.

„Probably a truck on the other side of the lake,” said Yura. „Come on. Let's swim.”

„No, wait a minute.”

We paused shoulder deep in water. It soon became evident that a motor-boat was coming from the North at a rapid rate. The throb of the motor became more and more distinct, and a powerful searchlight flashed about ominously. Panic stricken, we rushed back to the shore.

There was no time to remove our luggage and destroy the raft. We picked it up, and tried to carry it like a stretcher. At once it fell to pieces. With feverish haste, fumbling blindly, we collected our knapsacks and clothing.



The motor-boat was quite near, its light bringing out the bushes along the shore in bold relief. We dived into the wet grass behind some small shrubs and clung to the ground. From there we peered out, as the boat with fiendish deliberation crept along the shore, every twig coming under the searchlight's glare. Then came the moment when the wet branches of our protecting shrub were illumined by the beam of electric light. We buried our faces in the grass, and it occurred to me that it would not require very keen observation to find us by the cloud of mosquitoes which swarmed over our naked backs.

But the beam glided over us and the motor-boat passed majestically by. We raised our heads and saw successive clumps of bushes, of reeds, tree trunks, thickets, in turn exposed by the light. Eventually, the boat rounded a bend, and the sound of the motor faded away.

Jet black darkness shrouded everything. It was useless even to think of constructing another raft.

Shivering with cold, we donned our water-soaked attire, climbed blindly for a little while, and ascended from the bog. We sat down on a narrow ledge of rock, and remained motionless and silent through the entire night, the piercing cold penetrating to our very bones.

Before dawn we started again. Our feet ached. Yura's face was actually blue. My shirt adhered to the wound on my back, and my first movement tore the thin, newly-healed skin. From the South-west we heard dogs yapping and a few shots. We wondered if the shots were intended for us.

If the half-light of dawn, we wandered about a mile along the bank, and discovered a tiny island entirely overgrown with trees and bushes. It projected into the lake for about two hundred yards. A sand shoal, partly submerged, joined it with the mainland. The morning light revealed a thin haze on the surface of the water. Not far from us a shot rang out. A dog barked.

Neither of us spoke. There was no need of words. We both knew exactly what must be done. We reached the island, cut some dry fir branches, and

tied together a long, clumsy raft. We had just launched it and loaded it with our sacks and clothing, when we heard the boat again. We plunged into the bushes.

The boat proceeded to the North, occasionally hidden in the mist, sometimes reappearing in all its splendid antagonism. It was a small craft, with an outboard motor, a searchlight, and a machine-gun manned by four men.

I prepared Yura for the worst, telling him that if we were overtaken while swimming, to surrender immediately. Then, if they hauled us on board, to grab the nearest man, and fall to the deck with him. The double weight would probably capsize the boat. Then we should have to do as best we could in the water.

I asked Yura whether he remembered his 'jiu-jitsu', and could apply it under such desperate conditions.

He replied that his memory and efficiency would not fail him.

The sound of the motor died away. She could scarcely be back in half an hour, and by that time we should be on the further shore. Never before had I displayed such proficiency in swimming. I could use only my left hand. With the right I towed the raft. Yura was more adroit. He held the raft line in his teeth, and performed the wonderful 'Australian Crawl'.

When we entered a belt of fog, I was fearful lest we lose our bearings. When we were in clear air, I was afraid we should be observed from the shore and fired at. However, when we had reached a distance of two hundred yards from shore, I felt safer. I was familiar with shooting, and knew that, at two hundred yards, a standard rifle of Soviet manufacture has a considerable field of deviation. This explains why shooting records in Soviet Russia are usually established with Ross rifles.

The reeds on the opposite shore approached us all too slowly, but at last our feet touched the sticky bottom. It was still too deep for wading, but certainly afforded relief. Fifty yards further and we stood up, dragged our

raft ashore, took it apart, and carefully scattered the pieces, leaving no trace behind.

Either from cold or from emotional strain, I developed a fever, and trembled with a chill. We reached the shelter of some nearby bushes, and Yura gave me a good rubbing down with his shirt. We dressed again, and climbed a steep slope. It was broad daylight now and, from our eminence, we could see our friend, the motor-boat, slipping over the silver surface of the lake. From the forest on the opposite shore, we heard shots and the barking of dogs.

„Apparently they are banging at each other,” said Yura. „I hope they don’t miss. I wish we had a rifle apiece. We’d show them!”

I must confess that my hands also itched for a fight. Had we been armed, I should not have felt so much concern for my own life, as in showing those unknown Komsomoltsi that the noble sport of hunting human creatures has its attendant dangers. But we had no guns. And no doubt it was all for the best. With arms, we should probably have done some killing, and probably not have saved our own lives.

It was full daylight when we reached the river, now spread out into numerous bays and lakes.

Walking along the shore, we spied a fisherman’s boat on the opposite bank. The boat was evidently in use, as there were paddles, a boat hook, and other essentials. It was highly imprudent, but we decided, nevertheless, to use it for crossing. With lightning speed Yura undressed, swam across the river, and returned with the boat; in a few minutes we were on the other side, bag and baggage.

Making our landing, we saw that a rude path ascended a steep slope before us. Yura, naked as he was, climbed the ridge, crept to the summit, looked over it, and immediately rolled down, making warning signs to me. I grabbed up our belongings, already ashore, and we rushed into the thicket.

After a run of about two hundred yards, I stopped and looked around. No sign of Yura. All around me was dense undergrowth, with no sound of either Yura's footsteps or his voice. To call him would be madness. Surely he had seen someone on the other side of the ridge. Could it have been a patrol?

How had we lost each other? A few more minutes passed. No Yura. Suppose he had somehow fallen?

Was it our destiny to play blind-man's buff in this jungle with some unknown danger? What if we failed to find each other at all? Horror overcame me. How could Yura, completely naked, crawl through these bushes? What would he do? He had nothing but his spectacles. No knife. No matches. Nothing!

Fortunately I was given very little time for these surmises. I heard a twig snap. I whistled softly.

From the bushes appeared Yura's scratched body and pale face. He dressed hastily, with trembling hands.

Cautiously we both crawled to the ridge and looked. Below was another lake. Two fishermen were busy with their net. Three patrol men with a dog were sitting nearby. All no more than three hundred yards from our post of observation. Stealthily we crept back.

„One should not expect God to protect him when he does reckless things, nor even build any hopes of St. Nicholas' protection. No more such daring crossings for me!”

„It's not worth it,” agreed Yura. „Never again.”

That day we exerted ourselves to cover as much distance as possible.

Thus day after day passed by. Ten, eleven, twelve. The nights spent in the damp cold or descending rain, the days in weary marches through swamps and jungles. Every moment we had to be on our guard, as alert as hunted

animals, menaced on all sides and oppressed by the realisation that there was no return.

The twelfth day came, yet nothing suggested the Finnish border. We crossed numerous vistas, cut by the Bolsheviks in the Karelian forests. We examined various posts and markers and were petrified by a series of stakes, driven into the ground, bearing such inscriptions as: Tvanov's Patrol, party of seven men, passed here 8/8 at 7.40 a.m. Direction N.W. No traces found.'

What traces? Traces of whom? We veered sharply from our course and, with forced marches, tried to get out of this area. Several times it seemed that we had crossed the border. We found some posts with the Russian double-headed eagle roughly hewn on one side and on the other the lion of Finland. These signs were weather-beaten and partially incrustated with moss, from which I surmised them to be signs of the old Russo-Finnish frontier. The new frontier, however, follows the old one almost invariably. Yet for two days more we travelled on, still finding the usual Soviet poles, and additional patrol memoranda on the mysterious stakes.

It began to appear as if we were subject to hallucination. One evening just as we were going to sleep under a blanket of damp moss, Yura raised himself on his elbow. „Listen, Dad, it sounds like a train.”

I listened. In the distant West, my ears detected the faint but distinct clicking of train wheels on the rails. Had it been from the East I would have believed that we had, in our confusion, retraced our steps, and were approaching the railroad leading to Murmansk. I had heard of many instances where people had become confused, and had returned almost to the place from which they started. But the sounds came from the West. The nearest Finnish railroad is a hundred miles from the frontier. Could we possibly have advanced such a distance beyond the Finnish border without knowing it? Or had a new branch been built recently?

But I needed to exercise only a little sustained attention, and immediately the wheel-clickings changed into the rhythmic rustle of pine branches. But

with the relaxation of thought, the sound of steel on steel became temptingly acceptable once more.

These illusions pursued us into Finland itself, growing more and more realistic with each succeeding night.

When I worked out our itinerary, I estimated that it would take eight days of marching. As the crow flies, we had to cover about one hundred miles. With our physical fitness this could have been covered, on fairly good roads, in two days. But since there were no good roads, and we had our heavy knapsacks, I had allowed eight days for the journey.

Yura was keeping a calendar of our wanderings. Without this we should have lost count of time completely. The eight days passed, nine, ten, two more, yet all around us the same terrain. Ridges covered with tangled branches, fallen trees, swamps, lakes, and river courses.

The fear that we had lost our bearings haunted me. However, we could not have mistaken the general direction very greatly. In crossing the large lake, we might have diverged more to the North than necessary. If so, we were travelling almost parallel with the boundary, which implied the presence of danger.

Our burdensome stock of provisions, which had so seriously incommoded us, now served us well.

With this reserve, we could continue our journey with little fear of starvation. Yura's buoyancy also helped to inspire me. Nothing ever dispelled Yura's cheerfulness except the occasionally heavy downpours during the night.

In our prolonged meanderings through this sparsely inhabited country, we chanced on three villages only, one of them depopulated through wholesale banishment. On this particular day, we had taken our midday rest on the shore of a beautiful lake. Resuming our march, we found a dilapidated landing, with a half-submerged boat moored to it. The oars were in the boat, as if left there only yesterday. We could find no reasonable explanation of

what we saw, but after several minutes of breaking through a mass of tangled branches and bushes, I came in contact with a log wall.

The wall proved to be part of a peasant's dwelling. The hut itself seemed sound enough, but the vicinity was completely covered with saplings. The house was vacant, save for some broken old kettles on the shelves. Everything was smothered with dust and mould. Grass grew through cracks in the floor.

The air was damp and musty. Apparently the deserted dwelling was not an isolated one. Over the tops of young trees we saw several roofs. I explained to Yura that it was probably a village, forcibly 'evacuated' by the Bolsheviks, who had dispossessed the so-called Kulaks. Yura suggested that if we were to look round, we might find guns or other useful weapons.

We went through all the houses, each as desolate as the first. Nothing but useless kettles, broken furniture, and the tattered fragments of clothing and bedding. On the floor of one domicile we stumbled over a human skeleton, and that, we decided was enough for us; we searched no further.

Downhearted and somewhat confused, we left the abandoned village to the taiga which was rapidly reclaiming it. A hundred yards in advance, a stone cliff rose to some height in front of us, and had to be scaled. We searched along its base, looking for a foothold to enable us to ascend. Yura was walking ahead. Suddenly he stopped and cursed in muffled tones. There on the ground at the foot of the cliff lay a row of human remains. Eight grinning skulls confronted us with their customary ghastly suggestiveness.

„Here are the bullet marks,” said Yura.

About the height of a man's heart were several deep scars in the face of the rock: a mutely eloquent conclusion to the story of a deserted Karelian village.

We stepped aside and moved on in silence. After two hours in which neither of us spoke, Yura said:

„We should have escaped a long time since.”

„We have been trying to escape for a long time,” I replied.

He only shrugged in answer.

## Finland at Fast

In all probability, we actually reached the Finnish border on the forenoon of a bright August day. The North side of a high ridge we had climbed, descended steeply to a lake. Along the ridge itself was a much frequented foot-path. When we stumbled on it, we quickly dived into some bushes. Yura had noticed a massive stone post at the end of the path, which I had not seen. Below, to the west of the ridge, stretched a swamp, overgrown with low bushes. A narrow stream flowed through the marsh.

Considering that the existence of the foot-path indicated the probable presence of frontier patrols, we decided to take a desperate chance. I undressed on the run, and swam the stream. Yura started to throw our belongings across. Wrapping my boots and some other things into my shirt and trousers, he hurled the bundle to me with a discus thrower's accuracy. In its passage the bundle unrolled, and its contents plumped into the water, the shirt for a time opening like a parachute. We were able to recover everything except the boots, which promptly sank. I was seriously annoyed and used very strong language, which helped not at all. Of much more avail, however, was a pair of football boots I had in reserve.

From the top of the ridge toward the South, a shot banged out. Half dressed and without waiting to finish our mutual vituperation, we grabbed our knapsacks and rushed across the swamp westward. Two more shots followed, but we plunged into the protection of the forest. Only there did



we finish dressing, and decided that immediate pursuit was hardly possible. We proceeded westward, after smearing our shoe soles with ammonia.

We were no longer pursued, so apparently, at long last, we had crossed the frontier.

After three hours or so of steady walking, I saw a piece of yellow paper in the grass. It turned out to be an ordinary grocery bag composed of two layers of strong, well-glued paper, such as could not be found nowadays in Soviet Russia.

The bag was immediately examined in accordance with the approved methods of Sherlock Holmes.

Crumbs of white bread were scattered inside, clearly indicating its bourgeois character. The edges of the bag were pasted with a strip of white paper. We also found the piece of string with which the receptacle had been tied; this also is a rarity in Soviet Russia. There could be no doubt of the non-proletarian nature of the bag and string, not to mention the white bread.

Yura solemnly rose and embraced me ceremoniously. In sheer exultation, we began to spar, and indulged ourselves in the utterance of certain excellent and expressive terms, untranslatable and perhaps unprintable. This concluded, Yura removed his ragged helmet, made on the pattern of the military headgear of the Red Army, and despite his free-thinking opinions, made the orthodox sign of the cross.

Nevertheless, I was not completely certain that we were in Finnish territory. The paper bag might have been dropped by some smuggler, or by one of those harmless lunatics, a Finnish Communist, aspiring to reach the 'Socialist Paradise', or by a commonplace Soviet Patrol Officer. Who knew what sort of reception awaited him from some of the border people? Moreover, I was well aware that in some cases the Soviet patrols arrested refugees even in Finnish territory. The 'comrades' aren't greatly deterred by international law.

We camped that night on a mountain-top. The weather was foul. A sharp wind rustled the pines. A drizzling rain fell. While Yura was making some sort of lair under the shaggy fir branches, I went down to get some water. On the other shore of the lake, almost screened from view by rain, I could see the outline of a large building. I could distinguish nothing more.

The rain increased. The wind was rising to a hurricane. We spent the whole night shivering. The weather improved in the morning, and when we went down to the shore, the building beyond the lake could be seen quite clearly. It was a very large structure, with outbuildings. The door was wide open.

We concealed ourselves in the bushes opposite the building to watch. No activity. The door stood open but there was no sign of human habitation. We decided to investigate.

After circling the lake to within fifty yards of the structure, we crawled on all fours. Yura was a little in advance, I heard his enthusiastic exclamation. „Hurrah! There’s no doubt about it now. It’s Finland!”

He had stumbled on a heap of rubbish. There were some torn newspapers printed, as we supposed, in Finnish. Still, the language might have been Karelian, as we knew neither tongue. But there were also empty tin-cans and cigarette cartons. Some of the labels were in Swedish. We were certainly in Finnish territory.

We were still unaware as to the extent of our penetration into Finland, nor did we know the direction in which to travel towards an inhabited district. True to the tradition of Russian refugees, we preferred to approach foreign authorities as far as possible from the Soviet border. Who could tell what unwritten pacts might exist between neighbouring frontier posts? Politics are politics, but neighbourly life is, very frequently, what it is. One might be deported to Russia through the friendship of neighbours.

True, I had chosen to escape into Finland, because from her, more than from any other adjoining State, one could expect kind and considerate treatment, but one couldn’t be positive as to the nature of unwritten law in this wilderness.

While I was pondering these perplexities, Yura was urging me to advance and enter the building. I held him back, and with extreme caution and throbbing hearts, we crept closer and ultimately entered.

It proved to be a woodman's commodious camp-house, used in winter but left vacant in summer time. In the middle of the building stood an enormous stove. The floor was covered with discarded commodities, but they were all bourgeois in character. Yura picked up a pair of shoes, worthless according to bourgeois standards, while in Soviet Russia they would have been regarded as luxurious.

Empty cans and cigarette boxes were strewn about.

I had not smoked for five days. I pounced on them and was able to scrape up enough tobacco crumbs for half a cigarette. Yura found something which looked like lard, and several loaves of bread, hard as a rock. We had had no bread for the last six days.

„Now I am going to make myself a lard sandwich,” he said. I tried to protest, but was too preoccupied with my search for tobacco. Yura spread some ‘lard’ on a piece of stony bread, and conveyed it into his mouth. At once his expression changed to one of utter disgust.

„Well, how does it taste?”

Yura was busy in expelling the morsel from his mouth.

„What is it?” I again inquired, perhaps in a knowing, ‘I-told-you-so’, tone.

„Ski-grease,” replied Yura, with ill-feigned indifference, as he modestly retired into a corner.

We left the lodge. The sky looked as if recently cleansed. The air seemed remarkably sweet and refreshing.

At the camp-house was a post bearing a sign we could not decipher, and an arrow pointing West. A foot-path, half overgrown with grass, led in the

same direction. Yura tightened his knapsack, and suddenly burst into a Russian „Pedlar’s Song”:

*‘Though my pack is full of wares,  
I feel no weight, and have no cares. . . .’*

Indeed, we did not notice the heavy load. After sixteen days of travel, our knapsacks were considerably lighter. To stride along a path instead of floundering through swamps, was an intense relief.

Our mood was gay . . . clouded only by thoughts of Boris. How was he faring?

„Nobiscum Deus,” Yura said optimistically. „Boris is waiting for us in Helsingfors.” As it happened, this turned out to have been approximately correct.

After two hours’ walking we came to a small hill, fenced, in true Karelian style, with fir stakes set slantwise. Beyond the fence we saw a carefully cultivated vegetable garden, and on top of the hill stood a small, very clean dwelling.

I noticed at once the painted tin sign of an insurance company on the side of the house. This completely disposed of whatever doubts had remained in my mind.

Near the house were two sheds. We looked into one of them, and saw a little girl about ten years of age. Yura poked his dishevelled head through the door, and expressed himself in every language he knew.

This produced an unexpected effect. The little girl ran to the wall, leant her back against it, and with her hands pressed in terror to her breast, stood there breathing convulsively with her mouth wide open.

Yura continued his linguistic performance, but I dragged him from the shed and some distance away.

We sat down on a log and waited with as much patience as we could muster.

A few moments later the girl darted from the shed, shied madly at seeing us, and with a frantic leap over the fence, reached the porch. Once there, she emitted a terrible wail. The door opened, a woman's frightened face looked out, and the girl disappeared into the house. The door was closed again. The wails subsided.

Yura looked at me thoughtfully. „After all, it's no wonder she was frightened. If you could only see yourself!”

There being no mirror, it was only necessary to look at Yura to form some idea of my own probable appearance. His face was dirty and swollen from mosquito bites. Soviet clothes and cap, all in tatters, a big knife in his belt, and large shell-rimmed glasses on his nose. I, with a fortnight's growth of beard, must have looked even worse.

We sat patiently on our log, waiting for further developments, but we didn't have to wait long. In a few minutes the girl darted from the house, frantically leaped the fence once more, and ran into the forest, all of which performance was accompanied by more piercing screams. From her intonation, we surmised that she was summoning somebody.

Soon the small figure of a Finnish peasant emerged from the woods. He wore a fine leather jacket, and smoked a pipe. What struck me most in the appearance of this peasant, was an air of absolute confidence in himself, in the coming to-morrow, in the inviolability of his personal rights, and ownership of his plot of land. In Soviet Russia in general, and in Soviet villages in particular, no such air of peaceful security can be seen to-day.

The Finn approached with deliberation, and examined us both with a searching look. I rose and asked him whether he could understand Russian. To my relief he replied in poor, but fairly intelligible Russian, that he

understood a little of it. I then explained our circumstances to him in a few words.

Certain little shades of suspicion in his face vanished at once, and he showed his sympathy by nodding his head vigorously, and even took his pipe out of his mouth.

He assured me several times that he understood the entire position very well, adding that his two brothers had been killed in the last war with Soviet Russia. He then wiped his hands on his trousers, and solemnly shook our hands. The girl peered at us from behind him, fear giving away to curiosity.

The Finn then took us into his house, into a very large room with a low ceiling, an enormous stove, over which appeared a row of brightly scoured copper saucepans and kettles. From behind the door to the next room, almost down to the floor, probably for greater safety's sake, children faces peeped at us.

Everything indicated sufficient, if modest means, comfort, and hopefulness. With a pang I recalled the ruined and dismantled Soviet village.

Our host then reported to his wife in detail everything I had told him, the report being at least three times longer than what I had related, until her suspicious expression was entirely replaced by one of genuine sympathy. As Yura sat grimacing and winking at the children who still peered from behind the door, and I sat with the Finn and thoroughly enjoyed smoking his amazingly strong tobacco, his wife began bustling to and fro in housewifely activities.

It wasn't long before the large dining-table was covered with an abundance of good food, such as is never seen in Soviet villages, or even in the cities. First came coffee with cream, as is the Finnish custom, then a fish soup, a fried turbot, a kind of pie, cottage cheese with sour cream, a cereal pudding with huckleberry syrup, and several other dishes. We were confused at first in the presence of such a banquet.

But soon Yura wisely loosened his belt, and heartily applied himself to the task before him.

Dinner finished, our host offered to accompany us either to the rural police officer, 15 miles away, or to the frontier-post, seven miles distant. When we regretted troubling him, he replied that he couldn't allow us to go alone, as we would certainly lose our way.

We rested for an hour, bade farewell to our hostess with heartfelt thanks for her hospitality, and started on our way to the frontier-post. On the way the Finn told us about their life, how with almost superhuman energy he had been able to clear a small plot of land for his farm, and an even smaller one for his vegetable garden. Then there was net-fishing in the lake, and in the winter he worked as a woodman.

How much did he receive for working in the woods? I asked. From 1,200 to 1,500 Finnish marks a month, he answered. A Finnish mark is slightly higher in purchasing power than a Soviet rouble, which meant he averaged 1,500 roubles a month. A Soviet peasant receives for the same work 35 roubles a month. How then could Finland compete with Soviet Russia's timber dumping?

The Finn was right. Without him, we should never have reached the post. The road forked several times, curved into swamps, dodged among ridges of stone, and sometimes vanished completely in a heap of boulders.

We had traversed about half the distance when a very large dog sprang out of the bushes, and rushed at Yura. Yura jumped aside, defending himself with his stick. I was just ready to bring my club down on the dog's neck, when we heard voices issue from a bend in the road. It proved to be two Finnish frontier guards.

One was a nimble young blond with twinkling blue eyes, the other older, heavier, and of darker complexion. They called off the dog and conversed with our host. In answer to their question about arms, we produced our knives. The younger guard made a pretence of searching Yura by slapping his pockets.

It was plain that coming across Yura and me was a welcome break in the monotony of the men's official duties. The younger one talked rapidly with our host, then turned to Yura, and by means mostly of gestures and exclamations, tried to discuss World Revolution and kindred subjects. I don't know how much the guard gathered from the interchange—Yura understood nothing at all.

Chatting as best we might with the assistance of our host, we arrived at a large building—the frontier-post. The Chief Guard, a small kindly man, gravely shook hands with us, and conducted us into a clean, spacious room containing some dozen beds and a rack full of rifles against the wall.

We put down our knapsacks. The Chief offered me a Finnish cigarette. As we sat smoking, our host meditatively made his report, the Chief just as thoughtfully nodding his head in assent. The guards stood nearby exchanging meaningful glances. A woman paused a moment in passing a door to an adjoining room, and looked in. Probably the Chief's wife, I surmised. Several yellow-haired children peered round the door.

The report finished, conversation flagged. Our host had exhausted his Russian vocabulary and, personally, I felt disinclined to talk. It was strange. For fifteen years I had looked forward to this day, my first day of freedom. Months, even years, I had spent in scheming, had risked my own head and those of others. Yet now, my hope realised, my freedom assured, I felt utterly disconcerted.

The woman came in and spoke a few words to the Chief Guard. He rose, and with a little gesture of deference, invited us into the adjoining room. It was small and spotlessly clean. A table stood in the middle, covered with a snow-white cloth, on which stood a steaming coffee-pot with cups—another surprise.

We were so dirty, our clothes in such tatters, our faces so swollen, that we felt ourselves unworthy to sit at this modest table. After a pig's existence in Concentration Camp, it seemed a very high-toned entertainment! Moreover, it seemed strange that it was unnecessary to provide my own piece of sugar



for the coffee, as was customary in Soviet Russia. It was perturbing to look into the eyes of this woman whom I had never met before, and whom I regret I may never encounter again, who, with purely feminine grace, invited us to join her at table. But after our enormous dinner at the farm, we could eat no more.

For a little time we sat and talked, but soon I felt intensely tired—a natural reaction after the wearisome days just passed, as well as from the years preceding them.

At last we rose and were led into the guards' room. There was a bright carpet on the gleaming polished floor. Two beds were ready for us. Real beds! After sleeping so many years on God knows what!

Yura was jubilant. „Great glory! Sheets!”

It grew dark. I went out into the yard. The wife of the Chief, with rolled-up sleeves, was kneeling on the porch, holding our much-battered kettle in her hands—the identical kettle from which the little girl in Podporozhie had tried, with the warmth of her own emaciated body, to thaw some cabbage soup which had frozen in it. This vessel had accompanied us in our first attempt at escape, then to the Concentration Camp, and, finally, on our recent sixteen-day journey.

It appeared that the woman was trying to restore the kettle to a decent condition. She was surrounded with cloths, brushes, and scouring powder. It was hard work. Of course we had not cleaned it during our recent expedition. The soot of our fires had penetrated the microscopic pores of the aluminium, and countless bumps against stones and trees had refashioned its pristine cylindrical form to one unknown in geometry. Yet here was this woman, on her knees, striving to restore the derelict. I tried to explain to her that it wasn't worth the effort, and eventually, with the help of Yura, who had arrived on the scene, we made her understand.

She laid the kettle aside and measured us with her glance. Clearly her overpowering feminine instinct for cleanliness was prompting her to improve our appearance—to wash us, scrub us, mend our clothes, and even

to tuck us snugly in bed! I took her hand, just as it was freed from her strivings with our derelict kettle, and kissed it—and honoured myself by the act.

Yura seemed in similar mood, and for a space we stood there under the darkening sky; then together we climbed a little knoll and looked out over the lake. Of course we should not have done this, considering the kindness of our treatment, we should have conducted ourselves as prisoners, and done nothing to cause suspicion to our guards. However, they displayed no sign of resentment.

We sat on the slope. The grey lake lay before us. To the East was the forest, the forest in which we need never wander and suffer again. Concealed from view beyond it were the boundless expanses of our native land. God only knows whether we shall ever see it again.

I took a packet of cigarettes from my pocket, a gift from our Chief Guard. Yura extended his hand for one.

„Why, Yura, you’ve never smoked.”

„Oh, well . . .” he replied.

I lighted both cigarettes. Yura awkwardly took a puff, and made a grimace. We sat in silence. The stars came out in the East. These same stars were shining over Moscow, over Saltykovka, over Magnitostroi, over Medgora, but there stars were seldom observed. People had no time for such trivialities.

Every reflection added sadness to our already heavy hearts.

## With the Finnish Guards

Evidently we both had the same feeling, that we were derelicts. As long as we had been struggling for life and liberty, for some kind of human liberty, our problems had been simple, if difficult. We had merely to live to escape being a little more fertiliser for the future fields of Communism. But I, especially, chafed at my inability to speak and write about the things we had seen and undergone, though the daily strife with our problems had left no opportunity for anything but their solution. And, strange as it may seem, our easiest times had been when, surrounded by danger, we had travelled through the wilderness; for then all we had to do was to keep going. Constantly to travel West! We are now free and it will be necessary to plan a course of action.

Like shipwrecked men washed up on a strange shore, we gazed over the lake eastward, where so many who were near and dear to us were perishing in the Communist bedlamite hell. Distressing thoughts and bitter memories arose in my mind. How we had failed our country! I, myself, had failed her!

Patriotism? Love of country? Had we fought for that? Rather, we had fought for property, for a political programme, for a party, for a doctrine, for monarchy. Boris had defended his beloved scoutism. I had battled for my family and its existence.

We ought to have understood long since, that outside one's own country there can be little for a man, in the large sense, as a citizen. No property, no politics, no doctrine, no career. His country should be to him, like Kant's time and space, outside of which there is nothing, vacancy! Yet we had not realised that, though we had fought hard enough. We had become deprived of our country.

These Finns, the farmer, the guards, the Chief's wife. . . . I recalled other foreigners I had met in Soviet Russia. Those credulous dupes who came to the U.S.S.R. from as far distant as America—how many of them are starving

in the Ural and Altai mountain wildernesses? I recalled the faces of some Finnish immigrants, people who had voluntarily, even with enthusiasm, left their native land in pursuit of the benefits they mistakenly imagined were to be conferred by Soviet successes—I had seen some of these enthusiasts in the deportation jail in Leningrad, with hollow eyes, and withered lips and cheeks stretched over their jaw bones. I remembered another party of such misguided immigrants from many countries, whom I had met on their way into exile to Karelia. How different was their reception from what we had experienced here. They were not offered coffee, and no one volunteered to clean their kettles.

Is the traditional Russian attitude to the 'materialism' of the West, as contrasted with our own 'idealism', correct? Is it really idealistic to confiscate a kettle, while truly materialistic to scour it?

Yura sat quietly, his cigarette dead, also looking towards the East across the marsh and distant forest.

Noticing my look, he made a wry face. Possibly he, too, was mournfully inclined. But Yura did not know Russia as I knew her. He had seen only its Socialism, the desolate life of Moscow and Saltykovka, people dying of malaria in the streets of Derbent in the Caucasus, Ukrainian villages razed by artillery, Concentration Camps, solitary cells in the 'Shpalerka' prison. . . . No, he had not seen Russia.

Yura asked for a match to relight his cigarette. His hands trembled slightly.

„Do you remember how we went to buy kerosene?” he inquired.

I shuddered.

This occurred in 1931. Yura had just returned from Berlin. In Saltykovka, where we lived at the time, we had been several days without light because we had no kerosene. We travelled to Moscow to get some. At four in the morning we took our place in the long queue, and stood there freezing until ten. As the crowd grew, I arbitrarily took it upon myself to establish order

in the line, and for this reason, as soon as the shop was at last opened, I got two five-litre cans out of my turn, more than the fixed ration.

Someone protested. A fight began. All this for ten litres of kerosene, which under the 'cursed Tsarist regime' had cost a few kopecks. Could this have been Russia? Yet, what other Russia had Yura known?

Of course, one could derive dubious comfort from the thought that after such an inoculation of Communist Russia, he would be forever after immune from it. It was, indeed, possible to find even other consoling considerations, but my mind on that occasion rejected them all.

The late summer sunset was dying behind us. The cheerful voice of the young Finnish guard was heard from the veranda, calling to us. We rose and cast a farewell glance at the East, where the clouds reflected the vivid crimson of the setting sun, like blood-red Soviet banners.

The guard had called us to dinner. In the little clean kitchen, the table was laid. Yura glanced at it with regret.

It was impossible to eat any more that day. As we remonstrated with the good wife, the other guards laughed and joked about something. They ultimately made us understand that they were wondering if such an abundance of food was the rule in Soviet Russia. I felt disinclined to admit the dismal truth that it is practically unknown.

Yura attempted to explain that Russia was one thing, Communism—another. He struggled with the subject in a medley of Russian, French, German, and English, in his endeavour to make himself understood. But, as this failed, we resorted to drawings, which perhaps helped. Just why we took all this trouble I don't quite know, as we were not in any way treated as Bolsheviks.

The young guard then took the pencil and managed to convey to us by pictures and gestures that he had received a medal for rifle shooting and that, in their spare time, they enjoyed trout fishing and duck hunting. The

Chief added a drawing that somewhat resembled a woodcock. Life was evidently tranquil here.

The Chief's wife then ordered us to bed; Yura and me, the guards, and the Chief himself. The guards apparently rebelled a little, a few bantering remarks were exchanged between them and the woman; the guards were vanquished, and withdrew. Yura and I prepared to retire.

I felt ashamed of my ragged clothes and dishevelled condition in the presence of the coarse, but immaculate sheets, and was afraid that the guards might think my scarecrow rags and tatters were Russian, instead of being of Bolshevik manufacture, as they were.

I stretched myself in bed with delight. The last couch I had slept on had been in the solitary cell of the G.P.U. prison in Leningrad, where at least one had a bed. After that there were only the bare boards in Concentration Camp, and moss and branches during our escape. Comfort is truly a great consolation.

But physical comfort did not afford relief. Instead of enjoying, as I had anticipated, the gratification of a goal attained, of liberty and security assured, my mind was a turmoil of distracting memories of the past, of vague and indefinite anxiety concerning the future. These chaotic sensations depressed me, and my heart ached with misery, bitterly felt but only partially apprehended.

The cleanliness and coziness of the barrack, which was run like a family home, the graciousness of the Chief's wife; the friendly bantering of the guards; the prevailing tranquillity; the absence of any dread or strain of impending destitution; the very smoothness of this well-ordered life, seemed a galling insult to my national pride. Why should hunger and barbarous cruelty run riot in my native land? Why the vast difference between our reception by the Finnish officials and the treatment of immigrants at the hands of Soviet—but, nevertheless, Russian—guards?

Could we claim a monopoly for the 'Russian Soul', of all the humanities?

Take my case: I, of course, did not know what was to come. But so far, according to the usual method, we should be under arrest, and confined, while the necessary inquiries about us were made. And yet we were not being treated as prisoners, or even as doubtful characters, but rather as guests, as tired, very tired travellers, who must first be fed and cared for. Had we met with official indifference, I should not have been constrained to make these odious comparisons. I should have been more at ease, I conjectured. The pronounced contrast between the compassion accorded us, and the inhuman cruelties I had witnessed and experienced in Soviet Russia, overwhelmed my heart with humiliation.

I thought of the rack of rifles nearby. I, like the majority of men, am attracted to arms. Not that I am bloodthirsty, but any weapon, from a bow to a machine-gun, makes its appeal to me. I want to take it in my hands, to test it, to feel my power over it.

I am a pacifist by nature and have an aversion from any kind of slaughter, although having, during my adventurous career committed homicide, but with weaponless hands. I regard my interest in arms much like an addiction to a hobby, such as collecting stamps.

On the rifle rack stood eight rifles of Russian design, a standard weapon of the Finnish Army, two shot-guns, and a gun of smaller calibre, unfamiliar to me. I must examine it to-morrow. Paradoxical people, these Finns. We are, in theory, under arrest, but sleeping beside a rifle rack! I have only to reach out my arm to vanquish the sleeping guards in a few moments. Funny Finns!

The proximity of these rifles brought an entirely new thought into my mind; one which would have been inconceivable at any time during the previous fifteen years. These rifles were our protectors, not our oppressors; a defence against tyranny! Hitherto to me, a Soviet rifle had meant only menace and despotism to us all—to Yura, Boris, Avdeyev, and Akulshkin, the others, and to me—while now these rifles symbolised life to us instead of death.

It was intensely humiliating for me, a Russian, to realise that Finnish weapons defended us from the arms of our native country, and that were it

not for their protection, we would be shot by Soviet guns as millions of all classes, landowners and peasants, priests and operatives, merchants and children, scientists and men of letters, had already been slain, and as scores of thousands of refugees would still be despatched if they were foolish enough to return.

I wanted to handle and caress those foreign rifles! Unpatriotic? Perhaps, though I count myself as patriotic a Russian as any. And yet if I was a poor Russian patriot, I was immensely superior to those others who would have murdered us all in the sacred name of progress.

The Soviet rifles, though Russian, were a most constant symbol of the firing squad: the Finnish rifles, though not Russian, were powerful symbols of peaceful civilised life.

Such were my reflections on military weapons at the Finnish frontier-post. Now, out of range of Soviet rifles, when they no longer threaten my son's life and mine, I can still think abstractly of Russia as my country; but were Russian firearms to threaten again in the old way, I doubt not that I should once more revert to forgetfulness.

In spite of my being perfectly secure, having accomplished my escape from the pleasures of the 'Socialist Paradise', I stirred uneasily in my bed, tortured still by my meditations and memories. I am safe now, but if a million more of my countrymen are judicially murdered, what shall I do? Write a series of indignant articles demonstrating my incontestable arguments that Soviet dictatorship is a ghastly failure, that pure Socialism is a theory only, an Utopia, that the oppression of a nation is detestable, and similar facts? And then, shall I go calmly to a cafe, order a cup of coffee with cream, light a cigar, and philosophise? There will be themes in abundance: the little girl with the frozen pot, and the thousands of innocent Russian children who are rotting in the special children's 'labour' colonies of the G.P.U. in the far North, might be two of these themes.

Never in my hectic, distraught life, did I experience a night so distressing as in this attempted slumber under the hospitable roof of the Finnish frontier-



post. I was tempted to take the automatic and put an end, once for all, to the problems and anxieties afflicting me.

The considerate, humane care afforded two ragged, famished, swollen-featured, and, of course, suspected foreigners, was to me like a blow in the face.

Why was such cordiality accorded in Finland; and, to me, a native of a State which had so recently oppressed Finland? Why then, in my own country (the only region where I can fully enjoy life), should there now prevail such an unforgettable, remorseless, and sanguinary hell? How are these anomalies to be explained?

How comes it that I, Ivan Lukianovich Solonevich—a man above middle height, scaling about 240 lb., of sturdy build, with ordinary eyes, and a nose resembling a potato— can remain passive in the presence of this inferno? Why do I, although not completely cowardly and asinine, practically prove to be both?

The automatic was peacefully suspended on the wall over the rifle rack. I was in such misery and the firearm was tempting me so insistently, that I became seriously alarmed. Was I on the verge of insanity?

Yura was breathing gently in his peaceful sleep. But Yura was not accountable for the Soviet inferno—I charged myself with this crime. Thus, Yura, my son, could justly demand: „How could you suffer such enormities as these?”

But Yura did not reproach me. I got up and went out, to escape the lure of the automatic. I knew I was doing wrong, thus creating suspicion which might induce the guards to order me back to my apartment. A dog reposing in the hall growled at me. The little guard opened his eyes, restrained the animal, and gave me a glance of sympathy. I probably appeared like a lunatic. The guard went to sleep again.

I sat on the knoll overlooking the lake, and during the remainder of the night smoked incessantly. The pale daybreak peculiar to the North broke

slowly over the forest, and my mind rambled on and on, until I could see the Russian forests where tens of thousands of prisoners were perishing in Concentration Camps.

Dawn was succeeded by broad daylight. A patrol officer returning from his rounds looked at me, and passed on without a word. Half an hour later the Chief came out of the house, gave me a sympathetic glance, sighed, and went to wash himself at the well. Yura approached and critically surveyed me.

„I can't believe that all our tribulations are behind us. Have we really escaped?" he asked.

Then, noticing my distracted state, he added in a tone of encouragement:

„It's the reaction you know. When you have rested, it will pass."

„How about you?"

Yura shrugged his shoulders. „I really expected it would be somewhat different. You know, the Germans say, 'Bleibe im Lande und naehre dich redlich'."<sup>21</sup>

„What of it? Would it have been better to have remained?" „Never, damn it! When I think of the Camps, the children, I shudder . . . never mind, Dad, don't be downhearted."

Again we were fed to satiety. Then the entire population of the post shook hands with us, and under the escort of the same two guards who had met us in the forest, we started off on foot. At a lake some distance from the post, we boarded a motor-boat, on which we travelled over a labyrinth of lakes and streams. Again the forest disclosed shores, swamps, loose rocks, and boulders. Yura eyed the landscape, and grumbled, „Br-r-r! Never again will I put my foot down in such a place. I can't even endure the sight of it."

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<sup>21</sup> „Stay in the country and earn your living honestly"

However, he did survey it, and from the deck of the friendly motor-boat we really admired the picturesqueness of the Karelian landscape.

The calm serenity of the scene, suggested the retreats of saintly hermits of olden times—now that it had ceased to be an ambush for the ruthless G.P.U. patrols.

The explosions of our motor startled flocks of wild ducks. The little guard tried to bring some of them down with his automatic. Yura's face showed that he would like to have a chance to try too. The guard grinned, and gave him the pistol. Such a thing could not happen in Medgora Camp. Yura fired three times into a flock of swimming birds, and missed each time. The ducks took wing and vanished.

As the day wore on I became more composed. Perhaps Yura had been right, and I was suffering from nervous strain.

Soon after noon our boat landed at a tiny village hidden in a thicket. The guards trotted to the village store, and brought back cigarettes and lemonade. Some of the taciturn Finns from the village assembled at the boat, and listened sympathetically to the animated story our escort related about our adventures, nodding their heads sagely. The little guard gesticulated so wildly that he might have been an Italian instead of a Finn, and he was probably embroidering the tale considerably, judging from his excitement and the amazement of the audience.

In the evening we reached a frontier-post where three soldiers were located. Our guard once more related our experiences, the wonders, ejaculations, and gestures increasing with each telling. Our hosts made a large kettle of fish soup, and after supper we went to sleep on hay. And I slept like a log.

In the early morning we came to a settlement of about two hundred houses in a forest clearing. Later we learned that the village was Illomantsi and that it was the headquarters of the regional frontier guards.

It was very early when we arrived, and the staff was still asleep.

Soon our guards conducted us on a round of social calls on their friends. At each house things seemed to happen according to ritual. The little guard retold his story with the customary gestures; the auditors listened with 'ah's' and 'oh's'; the hostesses bustled about kitchens, and in a few minutes coffee, cream, butter, etc., were served.

With mixed feelings of interest and bitterness, we observed these homes of relatively poor people.

There were neat curtains at the windows, naive chromos, embroidered tablecloths; the plump, tidy housewives, and everything to suggest comfort and security.

By the time we reached the third house on our round, we could eat nothing more. The tour came to an end at the local photographer's, who photographed the four of us. Our friends, the guards, were thrilled with the glory of being participants in such a sensational occurrence.

At last we arrived at staff headquarters. Our guards stood smartly at attention as soon as an officer appeared. The little guard started to make his formal report, but he could not adequately narrate so thrilling a tale without gesticulation, and, very soon, nothing was left of his smartness. Evidently the Finnish army is completely democratic.

We were now able to communicate in German with the Staff officer in charge. An examination was made, the first on foreign territory. It was brief. Who were we? Our professions? Where did we come from? etc.

The examination concluded, refreshments were once more urged upon us.

The Concentration Camp papers gave my profession as 'instructor of Physical Culture', and the soldiers took advantage of the opportunity to gather in the evening, which was spent in discus and shot throwing. One of the soldiers spoke intelligible English.

Finnish 'neities' (who correspond to the French 'mademoiselles') stood about, giggling and whispering. They were employed in the barrack, and

also in the Staff headquarters. They looked as fresh and clean as if they had just been adorned by the most superior shop in town. Other 'neities' brought us oranges and bananas.

Beds were made for us on hay, but supplied with sheets, pillows, blankets, all complete and comfortable.

In the morning when our guards took leave of us, they shook our hands, slapped us on the back, and talked a great deal. They were no doubt saying very nice things. It is a pity we could not understand a word they said.

## In a Finnish House of Detention

At Illomantsi we were transferred to the civilian authorities. A man of unconcerned demeanour took us by motor-bus to a town of about ten thousand inhabitants, left us on the side-walk, and disappeared.

Passers-by glanced at us with eyes in which reticence vainly contended with curiosity and astonishment.

At last someone arrived with a motor-cycle and drove us into the suburbs, where we were incarcerated. Later we were assured that we were not under arrest, but merely in quarantine. All right, quarantine it was.

The prison was such a simple structure that, with our experience, it would have been an easy matter to leave it, but there was really no reason for this. The man who accompanied us looked as if he intended to search our luggage, then thought better of it, and left immediately. A couple of hours later he returned with a car and carried us to another part of the city, apparently to the office of the secret police.

My ideas concerning the functions of the Finnish secret police are rather hazy: a tall, elderly gentleman, speaking broken Russian, at once began his investigation:

„Are you a member of the C.P.S.U. (The Communist Bolshevik Party of the Soviet Union)? Are you a member of M.O.P.R., S.P.T.?” The last probably meant Society of Proletarian Tourism.

We changed from Russian to German and the inquiry concerning my numerous memberships ended abruptly. I filled in a kind of questionnaire. Then I asked him to do me two favours. To inquire as to what had happened to Boris, who, according to our reckoning should have crossed the Finnish boundary at about the same time as ourselves, and I also requested a loan in order to send a telegram to my wife in Berlin.

With this the inquiry terminated.

The following day our motor-cycle driver came to our place of detention accompanied by a ‘neity’ of very businesslike mien, but as comely as any of the other women we had met. She brought me a money order sent from Berlin and a telegram containing greetings.

An hour later the secret service official rang me up on the telephone, and, after expressing his hearty congratulations, informed me that a person calling himself Boris Solonevich crossed the Finnish frontier on the 12<sup>th</sup> of this month. Yura, standing nearby, observed the expression on my face and exclaimed, „I knew that everything was right with Bobe! Hurray!” He made a good-natured and exuberant pass at me with his clenched hand, but became entangled in the telephone cord. I became dizzy. Respiration became difficult for several moments. Was I in a trance, or wide awake to realities ?

On September 9, 1934, at about 11 o’clock in the morning, we arrived in a motor-car at our first ‘bourgeois’ habitation. The presence of Mrs. M., a representative of the Russian colony to whose care we were introduced by the Finnish authorities, could not deter the ceaseless exchange of questions and answers between Boris and myself. Was it not a marvel, a miracle, that

we were now in a free community, where there was no G.P.U., no Concentration Camp, no blood-stained shadow of Stalin. . . .

But my unfortunate, martyred country, will she ever be redeemed from the bitter degradation of hailing the supreme ability of men who are blockheads, and singing praises to the clemency of ruthless executioners?

# GLOSSARY

**Administrative Exile** by orders of the G.P.U., without trial, exile. The commonest form of banishment in the Soviet Union.

**B.A.M.** Baikal-Amur Railway; the railway from the northern extremity of Lake Baikal to the estuary of the River Amur in the Far East.

**Bushlat** Uniform of Camp inmates. As described in text, a jacket formed of two layers of cotton with interlining.

**Dmitlag** Moscow-Volga Canal Project.

**Donbas** The Donetsk Coal-field.

**Dynamo** Sports organisation of the G.P.U., distributed all over the Soviet Union.

**G.U.L.A.G.** Chief administration of the compulsory labour

**Camps of the G.P.U.** Seat in Moscow.

**Insnab** Food distribution centre for foreigners.

**Izvestia** Official organ of the Government.

**Khaltura** The word is untranslatable. It signifies a combination of jobbery, graft, and bluff.

**Kolkhoz** Collectivised peasant villages. The few remaining peasants in the Soviet Union are taxed so heavily as to force them to join the collective farms.

**Komsomol** Communist League of Youth.



Komsomolez	Member of the Komsomol.
Komsomolka	Female member of the Komsomol.
Kopeck	1/100 of rouble.
K.V.C.H.	Cultural-educational section.
Magnitostroi	Building of great foundry in Urals.
Makhorka	Inferior kind of tobacco.
N.E.P.	New Economical Policy.
O.A.O.	General Administrative Section.
P.E.O.	Planning-economical section.
Piatiletka	Five-Year Plan.
Pravda	Meaning truth; name of official organ of Communist Party.
Promfinplan	Abbreviation for Industrial-Financial Plan.
Shpalerka	Familiar name for G.P.U. prison in Leningrad.
Siblag	Union of Siberian Camps.
Siel-Soviet	Village Soviet.
Sokol	Pan-Slavic Sport Organisation.
Solovetsky	A group of islands in the White Sea, on the Islands largest of which was formerly a great monastery, now the particularly gruesome Camp of the G.P.U.
Sovkhoz	A landed estate under State management.
Svir Camp	Camp on the River Svir, which connects Lake Ladoga and Lake Onega.
Svirstroi	Hydro-Electric Project on the River Svir.

Svoloch	Vulgar expression—son of a bitch.
Torgsin	State-owned Stores, where goods were only sold for foreign currency or in exchange for gold, silver, or precious stones.
Turksib	Turkestan-Siberian Railway—built with great pretensions, now scarcely usable, and half sanded-up.
Udarnik	Workers distinguished by special performance.
U.R.Ch.	Accounting-Distributing Section.
Urks	Professional criminals.
U.R.O.	Main Accounting-Distributing Department.
Vokhr	Armed guards.
W.B.C.	White Sea-Baltic Canal Combine.
Yurchik	Pet name for Yura.

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# RUSSIA IN CHAINS

*translated by*

Warren Harrow

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